# THE LINK

# THE LINK

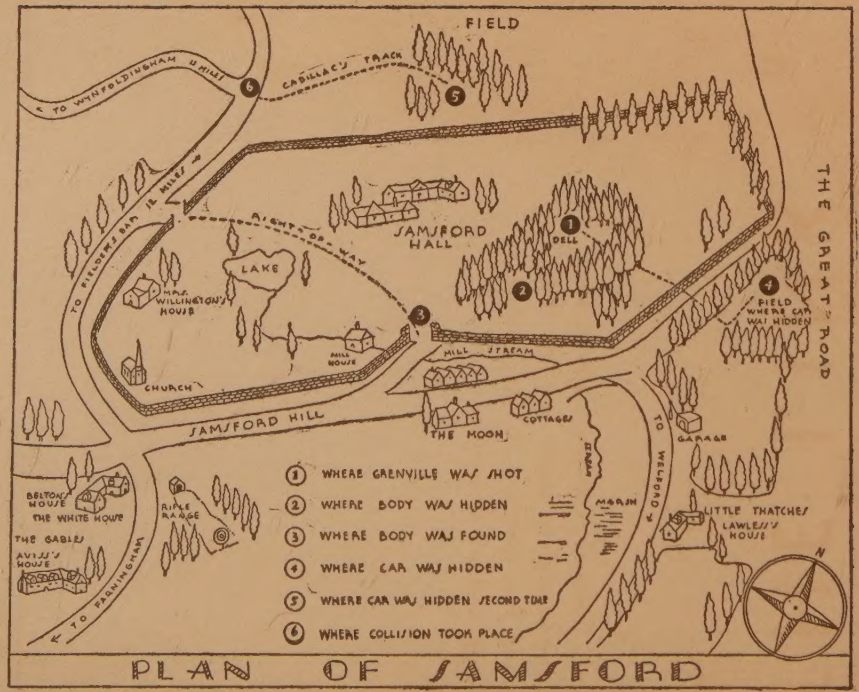
SOME OTHER BOOKS BY

PHILIP MacDONALD

THE RASP

THE WHITE CROW

THE NOOSE


FIELD
CADILLAC'S TRACK
TO WYNFOLDINGHAM 4 MILES
TO PIDGEON'S BAR 11 MILES
RIGHT OF WAY
SAMSFORD HALL
DELL
LAKE
MRS. WILLINGTON'S HOUSE
FIELD WHERE CAR WAS HIDDEN
THE GREAT ROAD
CHURCH
MILL HOUSE
MILL STREAM
SAMSFORD HILL
THE MOOR
COTTAGES
GARAGE
TO WELDON
MARSH
BELTON HOUSE
THE WHITE HOUSE
THE GABLES
AVISS'S HOUSE
RIFLE RANGE
TO FARNINGHAM
LITTLE THATCHES
LAWLESS'S HOUSE
N
1 WHERE GRENVILLE WAS SHOT
2 WHERE BODY WAS HIDDEN
3 WHERE BODY WAS FOUND
4 WHERE CAR WAS HIDDEN
5 WHERE CAR WAS HIDDEN SECOND TIME
6 WHERE COLLISION TOOK PLACE
PLAN OF SAMSFORD

PHILIP MacDONALD

# THE LINK

Only Colonel Anthony Gethryn was strong enough to smash the link that bound the innocent to the strange murder of Lord Grenville.

GARDEN CITY, N. Y. 1930 PUBLISHED FOR

THE CRIME CLUB, INC.

BY DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC.

PRINTED AT THE *Country Life Press*, GARDEN CITY, N. Y., U. S. A.

COPYRIGHT, 1930
BY DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

# THE LINK

# CHAPTER ONE

I SUPPOSE I must have spent the best part of a week, when I had made up my mind to write this book, thinking out what was the best point to start from. I tried going right back to the beginning of things, and found that that would have meant taking about a million words to tell the story. I have tried the old *in medias res* but found that I got so tied up after a very short time that neither I nor anybody else could ever have made out what it was all about; and then I put the thing away. I was a bit hopeless about it. And then it suddenly dawned on me that there was only one place to begin, and that was the day—it was the 23d August 193—when something happened in Samsford for the first time since King Charles didn't hide in the big tree behind The Moon.

The more I think about it the more I realize that that day—it was a Friday—might have been arranged by an expert playwright. From my point of view, that is. Because I have only got to start and tell what I did on that day to introduce all the important characters, give a very good idea of local feelings, above-water *and* under-current, and finish up by getting any reader right in at the death.

You remember that August. The hottest English summer I ever knew, and actually, or so the papers said, the hottest for fifty-five years. I waked—or rather got up, because it had been too hot to go to sleep properly—about seven. I hoped, without much faith, that it wasn't going to be a busy day. I was only halfway through shaving when to be a busy day it began. Telephone. Mrs. Willington's

cocker bitch seemed to have gone mad. Could I go at once? What was Mrs. Willington's cocker bitch doing? Mrs. Willington's cocker bitch was lying down in the coach house and wouldn't come out, not for nobody. How did Mrs. Willington's cocker bitch look? Mrs. Willington's cocker bitch looked queer-like. Panting at all? Running round in circles? Shrieking? Drooling at the mouth? No, none of these things. All right, I would go round and see Mrs. Willington's cocker bitch as soon as I could manage; that would be at approximately nine-thirty. In the meantime Mrs. Willington's cocker bitch had better be left alone.

I finished shaving, and had got half my trousers on when the telephone rang again. Message from Mr. Stubbs —Mr. Thomas, not Mr. Giles—please could Mr. Lawless come sometime in the morning and see one of the new Jerseys which had torn its leg on some barbed wire? Mr. Lawless might, but was Mr. Stubbs sure that he wanted Mr. Lawless? Mr. Stubbs, Mr. Lawless thought, generally had Mr. Clayton from Havering for cows. . . . Oh, Mr. Clayton was unable to come? All right.

Mrs. Yule didn't give me much breakfast that morning. Very wise of her. I was halfway through my third grapefruit, when again the telephone.

"Is that Mr. Lawless? Please, sir, Father sez could you possibly slip down and see the pony? Father thinks he didn't ought to work him to-day, 'e's that 'ot in one of 'is front feet."

After I had finished breakfast and had a couple of cigarettes I went out for that one. It only meant three hundred yards down the hill to The Moon, and I rather liked old Dinwater. As I got to the gate Yule came running after me. Telephone again. I said:

"Tell 'em I'm out."

The old man shifted his straw to the other corner of his mouth, twitched at the forelock which he must have lost at least forty years ago, and ambled off. But I caught him, thank the Lord, before he reached the porch. I had just remembered whom that call might be from. Might be, but almost certainly wasn't. . . .

Yet it was. For once it was. And it wasn't a message. She spoke to me herself. One of the hunters—the black mare which was out at grass—had slipped its leg through a sheep hurdle, got cast, and seemed to have a very bad sprain. I said:

"I'll come up at once—if that'll be all right?"

I had a bit of a job to keep my voice straight, but I managed it all right. She seemed to hesitate at that; she said:

"Oh—thank you. Yes . . . er——"

"I could manage any other time, if now isn't convenient." I said that very quickly. I remember wondering whether it wasn't too quickly, even as the words came out.

She seemed relieved. "Half-past eleven, I was thinking," she said, "if you're sure you——"

"Perfectly sure. As a matter of fact it'll fit in very conveniently." My mouth had gone all dry. I had to make two shots at the next words, but I got them out all right.

"At the house," she answered them. "If you wouldn't mind. Then I could come with you."

I went down the hill after that at a good five miles an hour, instead of the wheezy three most people were using that summer. I didn't even remember it was hot; at least, not until I got into the hutch that Dinwater called a stable. Dinwater wasn't there himself, but his girl, Mary, held the pony's head while I investigated.

We went out into the yard when I'd finished. It was

cooler in the sun than in that place. I did a bit of mopping.

"You're *that* hot," Mary said. "Would you like——" She let her eyes flicker a glance toward Dinwater's back door.

"Would I *like!*" I said. I roamed off in her wake with that guilty prickling between my shoulder blades which I believe every Englishman feels whenever he is going to break a law.

Mary set her hand to the latch of the door and pushed. There was a muffled grunt from inside. It seemed that I wasn't the only law-breaker. We had to squeeze in past the thickness of Aviss, the American who had taken Lady Sibart's little white house every summer for the past four years.

I quite liked Aviss. Although he was rather truculently American, he didn't seem to suffer from the illusion, by no means confined to foreigners, that a vet. is necessarily rather a bad smell which you blow away as soon as Fido's tummyache's got better, and I also liked Aviss, not because I knew him, but because although he seemed to be a rich man he was an inveterate pub user, and there is always something more likeable about the men who use pubs than about those who don't.

He was drinking bitter out of one of Dinwater's special quart pots. He wanted Mary to get one for me, but I boggled. I said:

"It isn't that I wouldn't like it, but I've got what looks like a sticky day in front of me. Dunno what it is about hot weather, but all the animals, except the two-legged ones, seem to go down."

I had a half with Aviss, and then another while I stood him what must have been his third quart that morning. I remember, as I walked out into the yard again, seeing his huge face with those perpetual horn-rimmed spectacles

like two dark-rimmed moons across it, looking out after me round the corner of the door.

I went back up the hill again, much slower than I had come down. I tried not to keep looking at my watch; I tried to forget all about eleven-thirty so that when it came half-past eleven would be a marvellous surprise, but of course I couldn't. I got back to my place again, and managed to waste another twenty minutes watching Yule saddle Daisy. It was a quarter to eleven as I mounted her.

I yelled at Yule to take some embrocation down to The Moon and to tell his wife that the more drink and less food she put out at lunchtime the better I should like it. And then I let Daisy make her own pace up the hill and round over the Freeland to Mother Willington's.

I turned in at the big gate and rode round the drive and into the stable yard. Nobody seemed to hear Daisy's hooves and nobody seemed to hear when I whistled. I dismounted and hitched the mare to a ring outside the harness room. From inside the coach house I could hear a whining which I assumed must be the cocker bitch. I walked across and put my hand to the latch, but I had barely touched the thing before the door shot open and nearly took my nose off. Mrs. Willington herself. I hadn't seen her for a year and somehow she was even more like a dog than ever. She said, biting her words off in that way she has which is rather like a Cairn barking:

"So it's you, is it. Mornin'! What the devil they were ringin' you up for I don't know. Nothing the matter with the bitch at all. Simply that fat-head Mulliner. No animal'll do anything he wants 'em to. Don't blame 'em. Damn' fool! Only thing the matter with Dido is that she's going to pup. Quite right! Like to see her?"

I had been trying to get a word in edgeways all this time, but now that I had a chance to speak I didn't feel

like it. I smiled and nodded. I remember feeling rather disappointed that there wasn't anything the matter with the dog. Made half-past eleven seem all the further away. I followed the Willington into the coach house and found Belton there.

Belton was the Canadian who was very friendly—or *seemed* very friendly—at the Hall. I'd never liked him much. Pleasant-mannered chap, forty-ish, with too much money and one of those good tailors who seem too economical with their cloth. The Willington said:

"Know each other? This is Mr. Lawless, Mr. Belton, our vet.——"

Belton took her up. "Oh, Lawless and I know each other all right," he said. "Don't we?"

I nodded.

The Willington snapped her fingers and let out a shriek. "Dido! Dido!" The cocker came running up to me, wagging her tail, her ears flopping. I knelt down and had a look at her. Barring a trace of fever she seemed quite all right.

"Nothing the matter with *that*, eh, Lawless?" Belton always talked round a cigar, generally one that wasn't lighted. You could always hear everything he said, but it gave his words a sort of droning sound I never liked. I said:

"Nothing *much*."

"Anything at all?" The Willington cocked her ears at once.

"Looks as fit as a flea to me," Belton said. He had a trick of using perfectly English idioms and yet making them sound like Bowery slang. It always annoyed me.

"Definitely off-colour." I didn't look at him.

"Any fever?" The Willington knelt down beside me. I saw that she was wearing heavy box-cloth gaiters below

her tweed skirt, and the temperature was at least ninety in the shade! I shrugged. I fished out a thermometer and we took the thing's temperature. Two points above normal.

The Willington was worried. She always is if the slightest thing goes wrong with any of her dogs. If all the human household died I don't think she'd lose a moment's sleep. I wrote out a prescription and soothed her down, told her it was nothing to be worried about. I couldn't resist a smack at Belton though. I finished up:

"It's always as well to take care of them this weather, especially these heavy-coated ones. Mr. Aviss has been having trouble with his two, but I must say he's been very sensible about 'em."

I felt the Willington's bony elbow dig into my ribs and gave her a shrug of apology entirely hypocritical. I'd had my smack at Belton and that was all I cared about. The very name of Aviss was anathema to that chap, and any praise of him, even a footling little remark like mine, practically unbearable. He choked and dropped his cigar and started to say something, but old Willington charged in like a sheep dog after a stray ewe. I don't know what she said but she said it so loud and so hard that it was impossible for anybody else to get a word in.

I left her the prescription and went back to where Daisy was tethered, feeling just a bit ashamed of myself. Mrs. Willington came out and said good-bye to me and then walked off toward the house saying something over her shoulder to Belton about amusing himself till lunchtime. I took up Daisy's girths a hole and was just going to mount when Belton came up behind me. His cigar was back in his mouth and he was all smooth again. He said:

"See much of that Aviss, Mister Lawless?" He said the "Mister" like that, drawing it out. I was very edgy that

morning, what with the heat and this fellow's personality and waiting for half-past eleven and everything. I said:

"Not so much as I'd like. I've always thought he seemed not only very pleasant but extremely interesting. . . . Good-morning!"

I swung on to Daisy and she clattered rather indignantly out of the yard. As we turned into the road I got a glimpse of Belton standing where I had left him, chewing the end of his cigar to bits.

I looked at my watch—to feel, almost immediately, gratitude to the man I had been baiting. Only ten minutes to go and eight minutes' ride. I let Daisy walk again and deliberately, to keep from anticipation which might be withered, made myself think about the extraordinary enmity between Belton and Aviss. There was never much to talk about in and about Samsford except other people, so that for the last three years Aviss and Belton had been a godsend. Always they came for the summer, always they took the same houses, grounds adjoining, always they were meeting as they must at other people's houses, and unfailingly, overtly and covertly, did they scrap. If you mentioned Belton to Aviss that huge moon of a face seemed to change in a minute from a benevolent turnip to a rather awkward piece of rock, and the face's owner would turn the subject. If you mentioned Aviss to Belton you either had to be rude to Belton or were in for a thirty-minute discourse on the general unpleasingness of Aviss. The general opinion was that it was "partly to do with Mr. Belton's being a Canadian and Mr. Aviss an American—you know, my dear, the two lots can't *bear* each other. I remember my sister, you know she's lived in New York for years, once telling me . . ." and partly something much bigger, like hate at first sight.

Daisy broke into her long easy trot as we left the road

and swung left through the white gate of the West Lodge. It was very cool under the horse-chestnuts and I pushed the old girl into a canter. Twenty-three minutes past eleven. I should be at the house in four—twenty-seven minutes after, that would be. Three minutes early. Quite excusable.

Daisy's canter turned into a hand gallop. I don't *think* I induced it physically, but she's of a most receptive mentality, that mare. I let her gallop. Straight down the rough grass strip which edges the drive we went. I remember the delicious sensation of feeling a breeze again after all those airless, stifling days.

I pulled her down through all her paces to a walk just as we reached the gravelled sweep which leads to the front of the great mass, hideous and yet kindly, of the Hall.

I left the bulk of the house on my right and came, through the arches, into the stables. Grimstock, the stud groom, touched his hat as I dismounted.

"Her leddyship," he said, "give orders we was to let her know when you came, sir. She'd like to see the mare with you." He turned and shouted something and a stable boy went off at the double.

An odd thing happened to me then. I answered the man, but didn't know I'd so much as opened my mouth. Shows what condition I was in. He said:

"No, sir. We didn't bring the mare up. Leddyship's orders." His tone was noncommittal. "Fearsome hot, this weather!"

As he said that, I realized that I was cold. Sweating as I was, I was cold. Cold with that altogether damnable interior chilliness a child gets when it's waiting for a tremendous something which may at the last moment be withheld. I couldn't speak. I bent down and fiddled with

the garter strap on my right boot. . . . And then Sheila's voice from behind me. . . .

I think she only said "Good-morning," but to this day I couldn't tell you. Not that it matters. What mattered was that she was there; there in front of me—herself and not that lovely wraith in my mind I'd had to be satisfied with for this past month of days like decades.

I raised my cap. Still I couldn't speak. For a moment she looked at me; her eyes—those faint, oddly and delightfully straight brows lifted a little above them—made my head swim.

She turned and I walked beside her. As we went, through the stable yard, across the exercise paddock, and out past the ring where the jumps were, I believe I managed to seem as if I were paying attention to my job and listening to what she was telling me about the injured mare. But really I didn't hear one word in five. For my eyes were busy, when they could be, with the loveliness of her, and my ears were busy not with her words but with the soft, deep notes of her voice, and the rest of me was busy bathing in the happiness of being beside her.

Very simply she was dressed. A frock of some cool blue stuff which I believe was linen; a wide hat of soft straw, turned up enchantingly at one side. Her walk, unhurried-seeming, free and graceful and strong, took us along at a pace too fast for me, counting those moments when we were together.

We passed through into the second paddock, which slopes down to the willows fringing the best trout stream for sixty miles. I turned to latch the gate I'd held open for her. And she stumbled a little and put out a hand and caught at my coat. Her fingers, long, slim, cool fingers, were there, on the lapel of my coat. My head went down . . . to this day I can't believe that action was dictated

to my muscles by my brain. I mean I didn't *will* it; it happened.

The fingers were taken from my lips; the hand left my coat. It fell to her side. She stood without movement, looking at me. The quaint straight brows were drawn together now; but under the frown the gray eyes looked at me, and they weren't angry, thank God. They were saying something, though—something I couldn't understand at once; while I was still trying, she turned them away. She said:

"You mustn't; you mustn't!" and began to walk again.

I was beside her in a stride. By the way she'd said those words I knew they'd not meant the obvious. I said, after two attempts to make the sounds come:

"Mustn't what? What d'you mean?"

She stopped, and turned to face me. The gray eyes looked at me again.

"Hurt yourself so!" she said.

She walked on. I suppose I did, too. Anyhow, I found myself at last beside the rails of the third paddock, looking over them at the black mare standing dejected, a visible swelling of the near hind making her rest only the toe of that shoe upon the ground.

If that mare had been a dog or a human or perhaps even anyone else's horse, I'm afraid I'd've done my job badly if at all. But it was her horse, and a very, very good sort of horse at that, and, for the moment at least, I really believe that I forgot my own feelings. . . .

There was a head collar on the post of the fence. Sheila said:

"They left that this morning. If you'll slip it on, I'll hold her while you go over her."

The mare rammed her nose into my coat; then let me slip the leather over her ears and muzzle. A very kind horse—wonderfully so considering her sex and blood. It didn't take

me long to find out what was wrong with her. Severe strain and a torn ligament. I straightened my back and reported. I said at the end:

"You'd better get her in and I'll give you some stuff that you can get Grimstock to rub well in three times a day. It'll touch her up a bit but that doesn't matter."

The gray eyes looked at me. "She will . . . she will——"

"Of course," I said, "and soon enough for you to get her fit for cubbing."

All she said was: "Oh, I *am* glad!" but her look seemed to imply that in some way it was due to me that the injury hadn't been far worse. Quite foolish of course—I had only done what her own grooms could have—but to me quite wonderful. I said:

"Like me to lead her back now?"

She shook her head. "No, I'll send them down for her when we get back."

We went back along the way we had come. Thank the Lord, she didn't walk so fast this time. It even crossed my mind that perhaps, by some magic, she was like myself trying to spin out these minutes, and I had only just stopped scoffing at myself in my mind at this swollen-headedness when she spoke. And she said:

"It's terribly hot, isn't it? I think I must sit down." We were close by the trout stream and she chose an old twisted willow and she sat down underneath it, resting her back against it. I—well, I didn't quite know what to do and I finished up by sort of standing about. But she took a cigarette from me and somehow after I had lighted it for her I was sitting down too.

I was so full of the things that I wanted to say and couldn't that I couldn't make myself get out anything else, so I was silent, and she was, too, until she had finished the cigarette. She flicked the stub away from her and it went

up and out in a little arc and died, hissing, in the stream. She said, suddenly and without turning her head toward me:

"I can never bear horses to be hurt, but I think I'd rather have had that happen to any of them except Grizelda."

I wondered why she had said that. When I thought of a possible reason I could hardly breathe, but I managed to say, trying to make it sound offhand:

"Nice thing, certainly. Not really so good as that big chestnut, though; at least that's a more valuable horse, I should say."

She did turn and look at me then. Her eyes were somehow both angry and amused.

"I didn't mean that at all," she said. "I think you know that."

And then—as she spoke or perhaps just after—I got one of those sudden fits of courage which come to a man when he's so frightened that to face something is a relief. I said:

"Are you trying to tell me that you value that mare more because it was through that toss you took off her that we got to know each other?" Mind you, I was terrified after I'd said that, but having said it I thought I'd stick to it, so I didn't look away.

"*That's* more like you," she said surprisingly. "Now I think we'll go." I put out a hand to help her up; but no good. She was up before I was and now she began to walk as quickly as she had when we were coming. We were halfway across the second paddock before either of us spoke again and then it was I. I made that lame, inane remark which I suppose ninety men out of a hundred have used in similar circumstances at some time or another in their lives. I said:

"You do like me, then?"

She turned her head and looked at me as if I had said something original. Sheila never answers you as you expect her to. She said:

"Of course. . . . That's why I don't want you to hurt yourself."

"But I like it," I said, "or rather, I don't like it, but I can't help it." I stopped; honestly, d'you know, I don't think I could have walked another step just then. She halted, too, a few paces in front of me, but she only half turned. I said:

"Look here, there's something . . . I must . . . It's no good, I . . . I must . . . When could I . . . see you alone? . . ." The words were coming out all right but even to me they didn't sound as if they were in my own voice. "Even if it was only five minutes. . . . Anywhere. . . . Not now. . . . I must tell you something. . . ."

She turned completely now, so that once more she was looking at me. I don't think that at that moment I was conscious of anything but her; not of the sun blazing down on us, or the hot grass under our feet, or that almost brassy sky. Or who she was or I.

There was a silence. She put her hand out and touched my arm. She said, very low:

"*Don't* look so white. . . . Do something for *me*."

I didn't say anything. I only looked at her. She said:

"It's a lot to ask. Don't say anything else. Come back now and go round the stables. I'll—I'll think about what you said."

She shot one glance over her shoulder and suddenly I became conscious of where we were and how we were standing. "Her ladyship and that Lawless." I managed to pull myself together. When we got back to the stables and went round with Grimstock I think I had my party manners on again. After we'd finished I found myself walking

beside Sheila, not toward the box where I knew Daisy was, but under the eastern archway and into the Hall itself. She crossed it and ran up a flight of steps by one of the side doors. I halted at the bottom. She turned sharply and said:

"Stay to lunch." I don't quite know how to punctuate that. It wasn't a question, it wasn't an order, and it wasn't a statement. Like everything she said, even the most ordinary things, the little sentence seemed to have an elusive individuality.

I looked down at my boots and breeches, but before I could speak she said:

"Don't be so *silly!*" That was all.

I followed her down the flagged passage which came out into the square hall. It was very dim in that passage, almost dark after the sunlight and very cool. I could hardly see her, but something—perhaps it was a faint, faint scent—got hold of me so that just this walking behind her seemed something even more intimate, more wonderful than that miraculous ten minutes in the sunshine.

I think I must have been a bit dazed when we came out. The next thing I remember is shaking hands with Grenville. He was always very particular about shaking hands with me. He didn't like me and didn't pretend to, but I will say for him that he always went out of his way to try and hide this from other people.

There was quite a bunch there, and with the exception of old Felix Grand—the worst doctor and best door-step hanger in the whole of the County—no one that I knew. Sheila introduced me all round, but whether my head was still buzzing or that low voice of hers for some reason had momentarily lost its clarity, I didn't get a single one of their names. One, a fat old boy with a Madras complexion

and white moustaches, seemed to have a handle to his name, and I placed—quite wrongly as I found afterward—the handsome old lady in lavender as his wife. Then there were two girls, one chocolate-box, the other with a face like the back of a hansom, and a tall fellow in light gray clothes with a dark sardonic sort of face and a very odd pair of eyes. He seemed to be a colonel or something; not a bit like a colonel, I thought.

It was a nightmare for me, that luncheon. Even before the meal began I was wishing I hadn't stayed. I wanted so much to look at her that it seemed dangerous to do so. I wanted more to talk to her, but wasn't given the chance. I wanted most of all just to be near her—as near as I had been in that cool dim corridor—but instead was so separated from her that, as I couldn't look, it was only the occasional sound of her voice or her name used by other people that let me know she really was there.

Nobody knew me; nobody wanted to, any more than I wanted to know them. Except old Grand of course. I don't think I'd ever shown it but I disliked the old man intensely and he seemed to feel that way about me. Somebody must once have told him that as well as being M.R.C.V.S. I was also L.R.C.P. and M.R.C.S., and as he was only a very doubtful physician, he never could get over it. Whenever we met it always seemed to crop up somehow. Even at this lunch it did. He was sitting opposite me, next the girl with the face like the hansom. She'd obviously been asking him something and then there came one of those sudden lulls you get at a table, and his wheezing old voice was saying:

". . . but perhaps Mr. Lawless could tell you more about that. Mr. Lawless, you know, was once a doctor before he took to succouring our dumb friends."

I could cheerfully have strangled the old blighter, but a

moment later I think I could have kissed the top of his bald pate, because Sheila said:

"Oh, yes! Mr. Lawless's point of view is very interesting. Mr. Lawless was a doctor in France during the war and he got so tired of patching up the unnecessary messes which idiotic men made of each other with guns and things that when it was over he thought he'd like to do something really useful—at least, I think that's the way he puts it—like looking after animals whose injuries aren't their own fault as a general rule. Am I right, Mr. Lawless?"

I think I managed to look at her as from one vet. to one hostess. What I said was:

"Quite right, Lady Grenville, only much better put than I think I could have managed."

Grenville broke in now. I think it was the first time he had spoken at the meal. He said, rather heavily:

"She seems to have got you off pat, Lawless. But I suppose it's the point of view that attracts her. It's sure she's always thought a horse the best of all God's creatures, a dog the second, and man rather unnecessary." He's got rather a wheezing voice, Grenville, which doesn't go well with the remnants of an American accent. Before he came into the title five years before he had been in some business or other out in the States, and although he never seemed to talk "real Amurrican" he never succeeded in sounding quite like an Englishman.

Old Grand made a noise like "Tee-hee." Can't have been at the surface meaning of what Grenville had said; the old ninny must have been amused at what he imagined a snub. It *was* a bit uncomfortable, for after Grenville had spoken nobody else seemed able to talk again and that put Sheila's championship of me rather into prominence. I fished round desperately but my mind was in such a mess that nothing happened. Thank God that Colonel Some-

thing put his oar in. I don't know whether he meant it, but he started something quite different. I forget what it was now. It doesn't matter, but it was quite amusing. He even got me listening. Though I didn't cotton to him somehow, I had to admit he'd a way with him.

The meal must have been nearly over when up popped the subject of the rifle club—then more awkwardness. This time, thank the Lord, nothing to do with me. It was something at the end of that colonel bloke's story that made the chocolate-box girl squeak suddenly:

"Oh, Lady Grenville! Haven't I heard something about a shooting club near Samsford? I *do* hope there is one because if Mummy *does* take that house I'd *love* to join. I'm *terribly* keen!" Gushing young idiot! Sheila was very nice to her. Said there was a rifle club. They all belonged to it, herself included. No, the shooting wasn't done with any sort of old gun you liked. The club was a rook rifle club. Miss Something no doubt knew what a rook rifle was. Yes, it certainly was quite amusing at times. Everybody had been very keen and some still were. She herself hadn't used the place much, but then she was always so busy with other things and didn't really care a great deal about shooting. . . .

And then suddenly Grenville opened his mouth for the second time. He said very slowly:

"Damn' lot of nonsense. If they want to shoot, why don't they go out and shoot something, instead of popping away with glorified saloon pistols at three penny targets which most of 'em miss?"

It was all very awkward. It wasn't what he said, which might have been quite funny. It was the way he said it, and, more than that, the way he looked when he said it. For some reason or other he seemed to have lost his temper. His heavy face had lost all that expensive ruddiness and

had gone a sort of mottled dun colour. It was all the more awkward because it was so obviously not a thing to get worked up about that even the most inattentive guest couldn't fail to see that there was something else behind it and probably to guess, wrongly or rightly, that that something was matrimonial trouble. Sheila played up like a brick. She laughed, absolutely naturally and without any trace of either annoyance or the wish to cause annoyance. Her laugh is a lovely thing always and with it a lot of the jagged edges went from the atmosphere. She said casually:

"Oh, Charles hates it. He always has. I think it's because Mr. Belton pestered him and pestered him until he had to spend quite a lot of money on the range and what not."

"Belton? Belton?" said the old fellow with the white moustaches. "Belton? That a Yankee fellah I met the other day over at the Hamiltons'? Slimmish, darkish fellah? Bit too well-dressed a sort of fellah?" No doubt the old boy had meant to help matters along. Actually he seemed to have made them worse. Sheila said hurriedly:

"Oh, Mr. Belton's quite a great friend of ours. He's a Canadian really. He's known Charles for a very long time, hasn't he, Charles?"

Grenville grunted something, quite inaudible. The white moustaches subsided. I thought I saw Sheila flicker a glance at me, the sort of look that might have meant "Please do something," but again I couldn't think of anything to say.

I didn't understand all this and didn't want to understand it. All I wanted was . . . but I've said all that before. The situation was cleared once more by the dark chap. He started telling some yarn or other to the old lady in lavender. I watched him at it. Ostensibly he was talking

only to her. Actually, he had the whole lot of us listening to him. Cleverish sort of fellow, and very tactful. Although I didn't like him I must say I was grateful and I'm sure Sheila was.

The meal came to quite an uneventful end. We had coffee in the hall. I swallowed mine and got up to make my excuses. I wished I hadn't stayed. At home I could at least have thought about her, but here I daren't in case—well, in case something might show. I made my adieux. As I shook hands with Grenville Sheila came up. She said, as if carrying on a conversation we had stopped before lunch:

"Then you'll come up and see Grizelda again? If it's not too much trouble? I'd rather like you to show Grimstock exactly how much rubbing that place ought to have."

My heart gave such a jump that I wonder I didn't gasp or sit down quickly or turn head over heels or something, but I managed to get out:

"Of course I will. I think it was six o'clock you said?"

She nodded and smiled and moved off.

I drifted away and found myself out again in the stables. Grimstock was there alone; all his hands must have been at food. He put Daisy's saddle and bridle on for me while I watched him, and we chatted. A good man, Grimstock. There's many a tip even the best of us can pick up from a man like that who has spent his whole life in the manger. He led Daisy out into the yard for me, but just as I was going to mount, I found that I'd left my cap inside. I said: "Hang on to her for a moment," and trotted back to the house. Coming out of the stables the best way seemed to be the way I had gone with Sheila, and I went up those steps and into the passage again. There was a soft carpet all down the passage and I suppose my feet hardly made a sound. Just before I got to the end of it—

there's a corner there where it suddenly swings round and brings you out all of a sudden into the hall—I heard a voice. Sheila's. And what it said pulled me up with such a jerk that I actually stumbled against the wall. It said:

"You *won't!* You *won't!* If you even try I'll kill you." I think it was not so much the actual words as the extraordinary quality of the tone that pulled me up like that. Her voice wasn't loud, the words weren't hurried. She must have been only a few feet from me, hidden by that corner. There was just an extraordinary feeling of somehow unruffled tenseness about her voice.

Then came an indistinguishable growling in a man's voice—Grenville's. I tiptoed back about six yards down the passage and came up it again coughing. When I came into the hall they were standing together, apparently chatting. Right at the other side of the hall were the guests. I made the usual excuses and took my cap from the table where I had flung it, and went.

## CHAPTER TWO

I DARE say you can imagine what that afternoon was like. I left the Hall at half-past two: that meant I had three and a half hours to get through somehow before six o'clock. Plenty of work to do, of course, and I did it, but that didn't seem to make the time go any quicker. Slower, if anything. And all the time—while I was stitching up Stubbs's heifer, putting away a black mongrel dog which belonged to the under-keeper at Wellots, drenching a couple of horses over at Saw Hill, and this, that, and the other—I was thinking not only of Sheila as I had thought of her before but racking my mind over what I had heard her say to Grenville.

I got home just after five, had a bath and a drink and changed into gray flannels. At ten minutes to six I got the Morris out and was turning into the West Lodge gate by three minutes to.

And then in the stables I was met by Grimstock. And Grimstock said, touching his cap:

"Her leddyship's sent word, sir, that she was lyin' down with a neddache. B'lieve there was something about 'er wantin' to see you rub the mare. Anyways, that'll be off." The chap could hardly disguise his disgust at such tomfoolery, nor his pleasure that a "neddache" had prevented it. In spite of my disappointment, which, believe me, made me feel almost sick, I rather sympathized with him. In fact, I pushed him over the bottle of ointment and watched him do the job himself at least as well as I could have done it, and probably better. I hung about talking to him. Just

on the off chance. When in decency I couldn't wait any longer I got into the car and ran her off down the drive at a disgraceful speed. I took her home, twisted round the corner into my garage at about thirty, scraped the near fender, ran her bumper into the end of the garage, switched her engine off, and left her.

Time: About seven o'clock. Too hot to eat, even if I had wanted to. Nothing to do except avoid company. That's how I was feeling. I went upstairs and got my rook rifle. It had just occurred to me that the range which was on the hill behind The Moon would be just about empty by the time I could walk there. They'd all be at dinner, even the enthusiasts. I'm quite a good shot but not a keen one. I don't like shooting game, and yet targets don't give me the same kick. But this would at least be something to do and I hadn't had my subscription's worth out of the place anyhow. I had another drink and a biscuit and reduced poor old Mother Yule to tears by telling her I didn't want her dinner. I walked out of the house and slowly down the hill, the gun under my arm. As I passed The Moon the hideous clock which Dinwater's got stuck up over the lintel showed 7:50. I walked straight by, past the mill house and up the hill to the left, making for the range. But I wasn't halfway along the four hundred yards of gravel path beside the road when I heard the vicious little "smack" of a light rifle. Someone was on the range after all.

I cursed him or her and myself and everything in general, and I kept on, past the little white gate which lets onto the grass slope leading to the range at the top, up the road. At the church I turned right-handed, climbed the hedge and got into Nickells's spinney. I had no definite ideas but I wanted to keep away from my fellow-men. I wished I hadn't brought the gun. It wasn't very heavy,

but heavy enough on a hot night. I went out across the spinney and through into the fir copse. The gun got heavier and heavier and my shirt began sticking to my back.

I sat down under a fir and smoked a couple of pipes and generally hated myself and everything. After a bit, to wile away the time, I took the pull-through and gauze from the rifle butt and cleaned the barrel thoroughly. Then I had another smoke. Until I looked at my watch I hadn't realized how late it was getting. I saw with a bit of a start that it was now a quarter-past nine. My mood changed from one of misanthropy to its exact opposite. What I wanted, I felt, was human society—and beer. I picked up the gun, put my pipe in my pocket and set off back toward Samsford at a good four miles an hour. As I came by the church and went down the hill again I listened for shots, but apparently no one was using the range, although the new night targets would have been good fun in this dusk.

I went on down the hill and pulled up at The Moon with twenty minutes to go to time, that is, at twenty to ten. I lowered my head and pushed in through the front door. The little passage and the sand-strewn public bar were crammed but the open door of the saloon bar on the left showed me that there were only two men inside it. I went in to them. One was Aviss, just as I had seen him nearly twelve hours ago, with a quart pot in his hand. He had walked down, as I believe he did four nights out of seven, after dinner. He had a dinner jacket on, but no waistcoat. A red silk cummerbund tried to hold in his paunch and only succeeded in making it more startling than ever. He stood in front of the fireplace and seemed to take up the whole of that wall of the room. I had always known he was a big man but somehow I had never seen before how big he was. Fifteen years ago, I thought, and without that belly, he must have been magnificent.

Talking to him was old Burford, Grenville's agent.

They both seemed pleased to see me, both offered me drinks, both said "Sit down," both asked inanely, looking at my rifle, "Been shooting?" and both called simultaneously for Alfred. Dinwater came in. He was in shirtsleeves and somehow this seemed to accentuate his likeness to a very wiry, very nippy terrier. He had once told me in a moment of gin-inspired confidence that his age was fifty-two. I could hardly believe it as I looked at him then. He looked more like a very healthy thirty-eight.

"Ahlfred," said Aviss, "Mr. Lawless wants beer." Dinwater looked at me.

"Evenin', sir," he said. "How much beer would you be wantin'?"

I gave my order.

"On me," said Aviss.

"Right!" old Burford said. "Bring another round at the same time and have one for yourself."

"And another on me," said Aviss.

"And me," I added.

Dinwater grinned and nipped out of the room. I say nipped out, because all his movements were like that. Now here, now there, just like a terrier.

"Sure gladdens me," Aviss said, looking after him, "when Ahlfred serves himself. Here I've been for an hour and that boy Jim takes an hour and a half to get you a quart. With Ahlfred now, he'll bring you another quart before you've finished the first. . . . Great snakes! What's that?"

I don't think I shall forget that moment in a hurry. Probably never as long as I live. Not so much because of the shock of what happened, though that was queer enough, but because of all that the happening led up to. As he had spoken Aviss had taken half a step forward. He was directly facing the door so that he could see into the

passage and right through into the public bar beyond. The quart pot fell from his hand on to the brick floor with a most hellish clang. Old Burford was also facing the door, and his eyes too were popping out of his head. He didn't seem to be able to move. He just sat in the high-backed chair and stuck out his head and stared; all the colour had gone out of his face, leaving it a queer gray under the tan.

As the mug hit the floor I whipped round past Aviss to have a look. He seemed, like Burford, to have taken root.

What I did see was amazing. I mean, amazing at that time and in that place. Something had happened in Samsford. Just inside the front door, not more than ten feet from where we were standing, sprawled the body of a man. A big man, twisted into one of those odd contortions only possible in death. His whole torso was visible but his legs must have been half out of the door, sticking out into the road. Peering through the door, only the head visible to us, was another man; a live man, a man called Welby, who was one of the cowhands on the Home Farm. Facing that head I could see another, Dinwater's. He was leaning over the little counter which separates the passage from the private part of his house. I couldn't see his face, but something in the poise of his head told me that here was not merely an ordinary calamity but one, to him at least, of special and terrific importance.

All this takes a long time to write. Actually I suppose about two seconds went by before I had pushed by Aviss and was out into the passage, kneeling down by the body. It was Grenville. He was dead all right. There was no need for any examination. I lifted up the big heavy head. Midway between the left temple and the ear was a small round hole, discoloured at the edges with blood and other things. Obviously a bullet hole, but the bullet wasn't anywhere inside the head because I found almost exactly a

corresponding spot on the right side which was the mark of the bullet's exit. There was not much blood; there seldom is in head wounds. But there was a little trail down the face which was already dry and caked. I went over the body as carefully as I could in that cramped space. No rigor yet.

It is always very difficult, or seems so to me, to describe in writing, or in words at all for that matter, an incident of this kind where a great many things are happening at the same time. All I remember is that during perhaps the first two minutes of my examination there was a dead silence, and then, as if somebody had given a signal, babel broke out. The door of the public bar, blocked very sensibly by Dinwater, looked like a frame for a mass of Hogarth caricatures. The bar had been full of its usual types and now all their faces seemed to be somehow packed together round and above Dinwater's shoulders. I knew all these faces but I don't believe that at that moment—even if it had mattered—I could have recognized one. When suddenly an unexpected happening confronts the yokel, his reactions always appear to me to be practically animal, and to destroy, for the moment at least, his semblance to humanity.

The next thing I remember is Aviss. He came and knelt beside me. He said:

"Right out, I reckon."

I nodded. "Better get someone to go for Morley."

Aviss got up. He said to Dinwater: "Where's your girl, Ahlfred?"

"Gone a'ready," Dinwater said. "Sergeant'll be along any minute."

I got up. Mechanically I dusted the knees of my trousers. I looked at Dinwater but before I could speak he answered me. He said:

"Welby brought him, Mr. Lawless." He still kept his trim little shoulders blocking the door of the public bar. He nodded at the counter on his right separating the pub from the house. "There he is," he said.

Welby—he's a heavily built, clumsy, much bewhiskered clod—was leaning with both hands on the counter's flap, looking down at what was left of Grenville. I had a good look at him. It seemed to me that I could see, already, a dawning of the joy which would undoubtedly be his as the centre of such delightfully unusual happenings. Not a very popular man, Mr. Welby; unlikely as a general rule to receive free beer. And now he could see, stretching before him down the years, pint after pint after pint in return for what he had to tell. He began to talk before I'd asked him; he jerked a thumb like a cutlet at the body. He said:

"Fundum 'gainst park wall. Just therely, by footpath steps." He jerked the thumb again, to indicate the steps by the gap in the wall which ends the right-of-way across the park from Cornston.

"Welby," I said, "you're a damn' fool! Another time you find a dead man, leave him where he is. Anyone ought to know that. You won't get any thanks from the police, I can tell you."

He began to whine. "'Ow war I to know he war dead? I'm no doctor—nor no vet. neither."

Aviss cut in now. He said:

"Shift yourself a bit, Lawless. Here's the cops."

I remember giggling to myself at the word "cop" as applied to poor old Morley. He had obviously been disturbed at his supper. He had a pair of old gray trousers on, bedroom slippers, no socks, and above this lot a most incongruous tunic and helmet. He clung to an enormous notebook as an inexperienced motorist to his wheel. I think

that at some time in his life he had once been to London and that the City police had made an impression on him, for he came out with the inevitable "Now then, what's all this?"

I left him to it. I found myself back in the saloon bar with Aviss. We looked at each other. "Can't speak for you," said Aviss, "but Earl J. Aviss Essquire could do something dirty to a bucket of brandy." He looked at me rather anxiously over the top of the horn-rimmed spectacles. He said:

"How would you English be taking that suggestion?"

"This English," I said, "very well. But we'll have to sneak round that back door into Mary's parlour and get it ourselves. They're busy."

I could hear the babel again. Apparently Dinwater, now that authority had come in the inadequate guise of Sergeant Morley, had released his very competent grip. I felt sorry for Morley. Aviss stole out of the saloon bar's back door. I sat where I was. I tried to think but I couldn't. All my mind would do was to repeat in a sort of shout words that I had heard in the middle of this day: "You *won't!* You *won't!* If you even try I'll kill you."

Aviss came back with two glasses and a siphon stuck under his left arm. The brandy, vile enough really, tasted like nectar. We sat and looked at each other. But he apparently felt no more like talking than I did. I was grateful for this. There was no sound in our room until Dinwater came in. He was very white and his hands shook. He put them in his pockets to conceal their shaking, and faced us. He said:

"Here's a queer go!" He put out a heel and thrust the door to behind him. The babel, which had been so continuous that almost I had forgotten it, was turned into a muttering growl. He stood there, swaying a little from heel

to toe, toe to heel, and looking first at me and then at Aviss. He said again:

"Here's a queer go!" He seemed waiting for us to speak.

Aviss did the necessary. "A deal more queer for you, Ahlfred. You knew him closer'n any of us."

Dinwater nodded. There wouldn't have been anything odd about that movement of his head if he hadn't seemed to forget that he had made it, and to go on doing so as he spoke. He said:

"I did that an' all! Fifteen years I was with 'im. Started off as 'is batman in '16 on the Somme. He kept me on after the war and I went to the states with 'im. Then w'en 'e come into the title and come back 'ere 'e got me this job."

A usual enough story, granted the first amazing hypothesis, and a usual enough situation—the devoted servant seeking solace for the death of a beloved master. But there seemed to me something wrong about it even then. I don't know whether it was Dinwater's voice or his manner or even something more indefinable than those, but it seemed to me that it was shock and amazement which were moving him rather than sorrow. I said:

"What's the next move?"

Dinwater rested his head against the door jamb. He seemed somehow to be conscious of his trembling.

"The Big Four," he said, "has just issued the dictum, no one to leave the 'ouse until the inspector comes. 'E's usin' the phone now. . . . You gents like another drink?"

Aviss answered for us. Dinwater picked up our glasses and went out by the inner door. He didn't come back with the drinks. Sarah his wife brought them. A little, thin, silent woman, whom none of us knew. She put them down on the table and was gone as softly as she had come.

It was the best part of an hour before the inspector got to

us. I think Aviss and I did some talking but I'm not sure. All the while my mind was shrieking with that inexplicable refrain. If we did talk, I daresay I managed to sound all right, but I can't remember any of it. Then the sound of a car pulling up outside; tramping; the opening of the front door; a sudden cessation of the babel in the public bar. Aviss and I looked at each other. A smile suddenly creased his great face, but he said nothing. For something to say I asked: "What's the joke?"

"Morley's pants," he said. "I'd hate to guess what the captain of his police'll say." I laughed more out of politeness than anything.

The door opened, and a tall man in neat blue and the flat cap of an inspector of police was with us. We looked at him. He shut the door carefully behind him. He said:

"Good-evening, gentlemen. I understand from the landlord that you were both here when Sir Charles Grenville was brought in."

"Quite right," said Aviss.

I nodded.

The inspector glanced from one to the other of us. He was a new man and we had never met. His eye came to rest on me. He said:

"You, sir. You're Mr. Lawless, I suppose?"

I nodded again.

"The landlord tells me you examined the body."

"That's so," I said.

His eyes, which were small and dark and bright under bushy gray brows, took their gaze from me and flickered about the room, but he went on talking to me. He said:

"You are a veterinary surgeon, I believe, Mr. Lawless?"

I nodded. He waited a moment. It seemed as if he were expecting me to say more, but as nothing came he went on

himself. "And I believe, Mr. Lawless, you are also a qualified medical man."

I said: "Yes" and shut up again.

The inspector hooked a chair toward him with the blunt toe of a very shiny boot. He said vaguely:

"If you don't mind, gentlemen." He sat himself down and produced notebook and pencil. "Mr. Lawless, after you had examined the body, what conclusions did you come to?"

I said:

"Shot through the head with a small-calibre bullet. Shot entered left temple, came out at corresponding place on the right side. Death instantaneous. Impossible to say definitely, but I should think he had been dead for not more than three hours and not less than one. Purely personal opinion that, of course."

The inspector wrote for a moment in his book. He then said to me: "Thank you" and, looking at Aviss, "And you, sir. May I ask——"

Aviss looked at him gravely. "Name—Earl James Aviss. American citizen. At present residing at The Gables at the top of Samsford here—Lady Sibart's home, you know."

Again the inspector wrote in his book. "Thank you, sir." He let his gaze flicker toward me again, then back to Aviss. He spoke, as it were, in between us. He said:

"Which of you gentlemen was it who first saw——" Again Aviss interrupted him. "Me," he said. "I was standing right here"—he got up and stood with his back to the fireplace—"and that door was open. I was talking to Mr. Lawless here and Mr. Burford who I believe's outside, and suddenly I saw the front door of this house open and something fall in through it. That something was the body as you know, Captain, of Sir Charles Grenville. Gave me a

nasty turn, seeing it drop in like that. The way I was standing I couldn't see that the body had been carried. You'll appreciate that I——" This time he was interrupted himself. The inspector said, suavely:

"Quite, sir. Quite. And it was you who first reached the body or——"

I chipped in. "I pushed by Mr. Aviss and went out and knelt down by the body and examined it as I've told you."

"Thank you, sir." The inspector was now apparently engaged in looking at a steel engraving, over Dinwater's mantelpiece, called "Lovers' Meetings." He said, after a pause:

"And what would you gentlemen say the time was when the door opened and you saw Welby with the body—or rather, the body?" He switched his gaze on to me again. I said:

"No exact idea, I'm sure, but I should say about ten to ten. I know I came in about twenty to, which seems to me about ten minutes earlier."

"And you, sir?" The inspector spoke to Aviss.

Aviss shrugged his tremendous shoulders. "Not a notion in the world, Captain. It may be as Mr. Lawless says, or it may not. I'm a very bad hand at the time. The only reason I know it was before ten is because we were still drinking here. In this free country you can't do that after ten p. m."

"Quite, sir." He closed his notebook with a little snap and put it back in his tunic pocket. I thought he had finished with us, and I believe that he was trying to convey that impression. He got up and took a step toward the door. And then, suddenly, he turned sharp on his heel and shot a question into the blue. What I mean, he didn't seem to be addressing it to either one of us particularly. He said:

"Acquainted with Sir Charles at all?"

Aviss looked at me. I waited a moment, but as he didn't speak I replied first.

"Yes," I said. "I vet. Lady Grenville's horses and I've done one or two jobs for Sir Charles himself also."

"H'm." The inspector pulled at his moustache. "Acquaintance extend at all beyond these professional limits? If I may put it like that, sir?"

I nodded. "Slightly. As a matter of fact, I lunched at the Hall to-day." The inspector raised his eyebrows. He turned back again and resumed his chair. He said, slowly:

"So you lunched there to-day, did you, Mr. Lawless? That might be very useful to me. I wonder whether you'd mind telling me one or two things, sir. Was Sir Charles himself at lunch?"

I nodded.

"And Lady Grenville?"

I nodded.

"Any other guests besides yourself?"

I nodded, but I thought that, much as I didn't want to, it was time to speak. "Yes, five other guests. I'm afraid I can only tell you the name of one of them. That was Dr. Grand—Dr. Felix Grand. I expect you know him."

"Yes," said the inspector. "And the other four you can't tell me about?"

I shrugged. "I'm afraid not, Inspector. You know how it is. I didn't catch a single name. I was introduced all round very quickly and——"

"I see, sir. Now, Mr. Lawless, the point I am really coming to. Did you notice while you were at the Hall, either before or during or after lunch, anything unusual in Sir Charles's or anyone else's behaviour?"

I'd been waiting for this. I achieved quite a creditable laugh. I said:

"Good Lord, no! What d'you take me for, Inspector? And better still, what d'you take *them* for?"

"Men and women, sir," said the inspector in such a tone that I rather felt that that laugh of mine had not been quite so natural-seeming as I had hoped. "So you saw nothing out of the ordinary at all? Saw nothing and heard nothing?"

"You're perfectly right, Inspector. All I saw and heard were the normal faces, the normal food, and the usual chatter of a meal."

He was a persistent devil, that inspector. He began to worry me. He said:

"No sign, I suppose, that Sir Charles and Lady Grenville had had any, er—shall we say, er—little disagreement? Or that Sir Charles or Lady Grenville or any of the other people whose names you so unfortunately cannot remember were, er, shall we say, upset about anything?"

I shook my head. I wasn't going to speak then. I was trying to persuade myself that this fellow's persistence was quite normal. That he would look just the same and have said just the same things if that luncheon had been as normal as I was pretending. He turned his head so that the bright little eyes under their bushy brows were looking straight at Aviss. He said:

"And you, sir. Were you acquainted with Sir Charles or Lady Grenville?"

Aviss shrugged. "Depends what you mean by acquainted," he said. "I've met Sir Charles on at least three occasions. And Lady Grenville perhaps a dozen times more, but I know neither of them."

"You met them at——?" The inspector's voice made this half-question a whole one.

"Here and there," said Aviss. "You know how it is, Captain, in this country of yours. You drop into a house

and perhaps people are there and perhaps they aren't. That sort of thing, if you get me——"

The inspector interrupted him. "Quite, sir. Quite. So you were not as you may say a regular caller at the Hall?"

"I have only," said Aviss, "been in that house twice. The first time at last year's Hunt Ball, and the second time when I shot my pasteboard there after the ball. On neither occasion did I see, to speak to, any member of the family."

"H'm." The inspector made his bumble-bee sound again and pulled his moustache. "Had an idea, Mr. Aviss, that you might be on very friendly terms with the family. Seems to me I was hearing just lately that there was an American gentleman——"

Aviss cut him short. He made a sound like a man endeavouring not to spit. He said:

"Amurrican, did you say? Amurrican? Let me tell *you*, Captain whatever your name is, that that joint you're thinking of is not Amurrican, any more than you are. In fact, as a citizen of the U. S. I'd like to say that though very likely they wouldn't cotton on to you, the people of my country would rather have a dozen of your sort than half of that dog-eared, herring-gutted blood-blister that you in all your ignorance, Captain, are speaking of. If you want help, however, I can give you his name. His name's Belton—Guy Belton—and the best thing about that's the Christian part of it—probably the only Christian thing about him. Mister Guy Belton Essquire *is* on very friendly terms with the Grenville family but Mr. Guy Belton, Captain, is not Amurrican. Mr. Guy Belton comes from Canada!"

This did me a lot of good. I had often heard Belton on the subject of Aviss, but, as I believe I've said elsewhere, it was very difficult to get Aviss on the subject of Belton.

He just used to *look* as a rule, but I suppose this unusual occurrence must have brought out a lot of pent-up stuff. I looked at the inspector's face and in spite of all my worries—and I can assure you that at the moment they seemed many and large—I'm afraid I laughed outright. Under this sudden and unexpected—and probably quite incomprehensible—outburst, that man of iron seemed to have turned into an ordinary puzzled rustic bobby. He pushed his cap to the back of his head, and with the gesture seemed to lose any impressiveness he may have had. He looked first at Aviss who, although he had stopped speaking, was still moving his lips and muttering to himself, and then, with appeal in every line of his face, at me. I said:

"Mr. Aviss, Inspector, was telling you that the American whom you have heard of as a frequent visitor at the Hall is a Canadian by the name of Belton—Guy Belton. Mr. Belton, like Mr. Aviss, comes to this district every summer and stays about four months. Mr. Aviss takes Lady Sibart's house and Mr. Belton The White House. Mr. Belton and Mr. Aviss are not the best of friends——"

"Best of friends!" began Aviss.

"Shut up!" I said. He glared at me for a moment and then seemed to recover himself. He grinned and walked over and patted me on the shoulder.

The inspector pulled his hat down again over his eyes and once more started for the door.

"I wonder," said Aviss, to me in a whisper, "what's the chance of another drink?"

The inspector's voice came again before I could reply. He stood now facing us, with one hand behind him on the door knob. He said:

"One other thing, gentlemen. I'd just like to know, as a matter of form, what time it was when each of you reached here this evening. Mr. Lawless, I believe you told me that

you arrived here at twenty minutes of ten. Is that correct?"

"That is correct," I said, "if the clock over the porch is right."

"Thank you, sir." The inspector turned now to Aviss. "And you, sir?" There was a little apprehension in the man's voice. He seemed to wonder if he was in for another incomprehensible outburst. But Aviss let him off; except on the subject of Belton he was always pretty much to the point. He said:

"As I told you, Captain, I'm not so good at p. m.'s and a.m.'s, but I guess I can hit somewhere within ten minutes or so for you. Let's see. I went for an auto ride this evening, and got back and pushed my car, which had been damaged, into Samsford garage here at eight-thirty. I then just walked up home, had a wash, let out my dawgs, and came straight down here. Let's see now, that ought to be somewhere around nine that I entered these premises, but I guess the barman here could verify."

The inspector opened the door. I think he must have thought that a dramatic exit might do something to restore his impressiveness. He said:

"The barman *has* verified, sir." The door clicked to behind him. Aviss looked at me and grinned. "Whaddya know about that?" he said. "And now what? If you could sneak around, Lawless, and find another drink . . .?"

I thought I might as well. I went out through that inner door and tiptoed along the passage to Sarah Dinwater's parlour. The door was ajar and as I got up to it I heard, the words indistinguishable, low and hurried and somehow urgent conversation. But I was harassed and thirsty and, above all, most anxious not to be alone with myself. I went up to the door and knocked softly upon it. The murmur stopped at once. There was a pause which was some-

how just a fraction of a second too long for normality, and then footsteps to the door. It was opened by Mary Dinwater, who looked at me round its edge. Her usually pink and chubby face looked drawn and thin and pale. She stared a moment, blinking at me as I stood there in the dim light of the passage. And then:

"Oh, it's *you*, Mr. Lawless," she said. She turned her head and spoke over her shoulder to someone behind her in the room. "It's only Mr. Lawless," she said.

More footsteps and Dinwater himself on the threshold.

"Yes, sir?" he said. His voice had a new harshness in it which I had never heard before. He was not uncivil, but his tone was without its usual friendliness.

For a moment I felt awkward. I was, obviously, an intruder, but I put my question and within two minutes was walking back along the passage, this time with a bottle under my arm. As I went in at the back door of the saloon bar I heard those murmurs begin again, agitated, behind me.

Aviss cheered when he saw me. "We'll have one and beat it," he said. "Baron Byng's just been in and given his gracious permission for us to depart to our homesteads, *on* the understanding that we hold ourselves available for a coroner's inquest, third degree, and general questioning when wanted."

By the time we had had that last drink the house was empty. I stood in the main doorway with Aviss and watched the police cars drive away. The first was a covered ambulance. In the back of the second sat the inspector and a sergeant; in front was a constable-chauffeur and beside him, his incongruous trousers mercifully hidden, poor old Morley.

The rustic crowd was nowhere to be seen. It must have been a police order which had sent them packing; I don't

believe anything short of this would have stopped them standing about, at least in front of The Moon if they couldn't get inside, for half the night. It was bright moonlight, and I remember looking out to the east to where, above the park wall and the great trees behind it, there showed in the distance the chimneys of the Hall.

A queer fellow, Aviss. I'd forgotten his very existence, when suddenly he patted me on the shoulder—an almost fatherly pat—and said:

"You get back to bed, boy. So long."

I started a little, muttered a good-night, and watched his bulk roll off up the hill toward his house. I leaned against one of the porch props and filled a pipe, but forgot to light it. I suppose I must have stood there, thinking the Lord knows what, for a matter of ten minutes; but at last I pulled myself together, lighted the pipe, and straightened myself for the walk home. I hadn't, however, gone more than a couple of paces before I heard a window open above my head and Dinwater's voice. It said, in a hoarse, shouted whisper:

"Mr. Lawless, sir! Jest a minute!"

I stopped and turned and looked up. He was leaning out of the window of what Mary Dinwater always called "Dad's snuggery"—the window directly over the porch. I said, a bit grumpily:

"What's the matter? Won't it wait?"

The only answer I got was the shutting of the window, and then, from inside the house, the sound of someone running down the creaking stairs. The porch door opened and Dinwater came out. He said again, still in that most disconcerting whisper which must have been audible for about fifty yards:

"Mr. Lawless, sir! Jest a minute!"

I had a good mind to tell him to go to the devil and walk

on, but something about his attitude made me change my mind and go back to him. I said:

"What *is* all this?"

His fingers caught my arm. "Come inside jest a minute, sir!" He pulled me across the threshold and latched the door with a soft decisiveness which suggested that he was shutting out the world. We were standing in the dark now. I said again, irritably:

"What *is* all this? What the devil are you playing at?"

He dropped his hold of my arm. He said:

"Gently, sir. Gently!" He had dropped that shouting whisper now and his voice was very low. "I only wanted to tell you, sir, in case you came back to-morrow and asked where that gun was you brought in——"

"Good Lord!" I said. "I'd forgotten it. Where is it? Thanks very much. I shoved it in the corner here when I came in." I turned round and began to grope against the wall.

Again Dinwater's fingers caught my sleeve. "S'no good, sir," he said. "The inspector, 'e borrowed it. He asked whose it was and I had to tell him. 'Ad your name on the butt, anyhow, didn't it, sir? . . . Yes, sir, he borrowed that, and he borrowed mine an' all. Both on 'em, sir!" He broke off there, obviously waiting for me to say something.

The whole beauty of the position suddenly dawned on me.

# CHAPTER THREE

I DIDN'T get much sleep that night. As I saw things, I wasn't in any enviable situation. It was rather like one of those weekly-paper problems:

A, being in love with C, the wife of B, overhears C telling B that if he does such-and-such, she will kill him. The same evening A goes for an entirely lonely walk, carrying a rifle, and returns to his home town to find that at some time during the evening B has been shot. A conceals from the police his knowledge that there was any friction between C and B and forgets, quite genuinely, to mention his own walk with a rifle. He finds, however, at the end of the evening that the police not only knew that he had been for a walk with a rifle but have taken the rifle away with them. Problem: What should A do next?

Be sure and post your solutions early in the hope of winning either a gramophone, mangle, or two dozen assorted bulbs.

But in my case, A didn't seem able to worry about anything except C. The number of times up to midnight and between seven and eight-thirty the next morning that I looked at the telephone—even sat down in front of it and got hold of the damned thing—I shouldn't like to try and guess. I once even went so far as to ask for the Hall number, only to funk it and cancel the call a second later. And then, as I was drinking coffee and looking at the omelet which I knew I must eat or reduce Mrs. Yule to real sorrow, I had a call myself. As I dashed for the machine, I had a presentiment that it was Sheila . . . but presentiments sometimes go wrong. It wasn't Sheila. It was a cold,

impersonal and official voice which said it was speaking from Farningham Police Station. Inspector Cross would be very much obliged indeed if Mr. Lawless could make it convenient to come over and see him at ten-thirty that morning.

I'd expected this, of course, but I can't say that it was any the more pleasant for that. The invitation didn't pretend to disguise itself as anything but an order. I said that I supposed I should have to make it convenient, and rang off. I looked at my book and found rather a busy morning, and then of course had to ring up old Clayton and ask him to do the urgent cases for me. He was very decent about it, as always. But this was small comfort when I knew I should have every one of the jobs to start all over again the day after.

Farningham is a good three quarters of an hour's drive. It's not so much the distance as the fact that the road twists and turns so much and is so beastly narrow that you can't ever go over twenty-five. I got into the town with ten minutes to spare, but went straight, like a good little boy, to the station. I was left in the outer room, cooling my heels under the occasional austere eye of the sergeant whom I had seen in the car the night before. Beyond telling me to wait he didn't speak. I must say that I always feel very uncomfortable in police stations. They've got a curious atmosphere which, even if one's only come in, say, to report the theft of one's own car by somebody else, makes a man feel as if he were once more outside a study door. They had me in dead on time; a small room with whitewashed walls, unpleasantly official deal chairs and table, and a cold northern aspect of brickwork which I suspected was the outside of a cell. I got my first shock of the morning directly I got into the room. My old friend the inspector was there, looking far less impressive without his

hat, but there was someone else too—the tall, dark fellow in gray, who had been at lunch up at the Hall the day before; and now I found out his name. After I had made my salaams to the inspector, this other got up and came over to me and shook hands. He said:

"We met yesterday. I caught your name but you probably didn't get mine. Gethryn."

He was, I must say, very civil. I wondered what on earth he was doing in this galley, but decided that time must tell me if anything did. I took a chair and managed to prevent myself from sitting on its edge and twiddling my hat. He was a long time beginning. Whether the silence was his method of getting people all hot and bothered, I can't say, but it succeeded in doing this with me, especially when, looking round the room, I saw my gun standing up in a corner.

The inspector rested his forearms on his blotter and looked at me. "We're sorry to trouble you, Mr. Lawless," he said, "but it looks at the moment as if you are going to be an important witness. We thought we would start off by getting a statement from you."

He stopped there. I felt bound to say something and so, fatuously, bleated: "Quite." He looked at a little sheaf of notes under his arm and then he began. He said:

"I would like to read to you the notes I made after our little chat last night, and ask you to stop me and correct me if there's anything I've got wrong. But first, I'd like to go a little further back in your evening so as to make my notes complete. Would you mind telling me, for instance, exactly how you spent your evening from, say, 6:30 p. m. until the time when you got down to The Moon Inn at 9:40?"

"Not a bit, I went up at six o'clock to the Hall to——"

"You went up to the Hall? On business or——"

I began to get a little hot under the collar. I snapped:

"We'll come to that if you'll let me tell the story in my own way. I went up to the Hall at six o'clock to superintend the dressing of an injury to a mare belonging to Lady Grenville. I gave the dressing to the groom and watched him apply it and chatted with him for some time. I then got into my car and went straight back to my own house, arriving there within five minutes. I then took off my clothes, had a bath, put on some other clothes, had a very light meal, thought that to pass the time I would go and shoot at the rifle range, walked up to the rifle range, did not shoot as I heard there was someone else there and didn't feel particularly like company, and went for a walk instead. I walked to the top of Samsford hill, across a field, and sat down in a copse belonging to Mr. George Nickells who farms that land. There I had a smoke and a rest and eventually returned the same way as I'd come, getting back to The Moon at approximately 9:40. That's the whole tale of my evening. Anything else?"

"Thank you, Mr. Lawless. Well—one or two points perhaps." Here he began to look at this fellow Gethryn. Just sidewise glances; funny sort of glances I thought they were, sort of way a kid will look at its mother to see whether it's behaving properly. But apparently he got no help, for he went on himself. He fumbled about among his notes, made one or two more, and said at last:

"One point, Mr. Lawless. When you went up to the Hall at six to see this horse of Lady Grenville's, did you by any chance see Lady Grenville or Sir Charles, or anyone except the groom you mention?"

"In addition to the groom, I saw one lodge-keeper, one lodge-keeper's wife, the upper part of two stable boys and the lower half of a third." Perhaps it was silly of me to get annoyed, but I didn't like the whole atmosphere, and I

suppose really I was a bit frightened. And when I get frightened I always get angry.

The inspector made the bumble-bee noise that I'd heard once or twice the night before. He then said:

"And you say, Mr. Lawless, that when you took your rifle"—he gave the slightest nod toward the corner—"and went out intending to, er—have a shoot at this rifle club, you say that the fact of someone else being on the range made you decide not to go there after all. Why?"

"I think I have already said that it was because I didn't feel like company."

"Oh, I see. Who was it, Mr. Lawless, who was shooting on the range when you passed?"

"Haven't the remotest idea. I only heard the shots. I didn't go through the gate that leads to the range. You can't see the range from the road. There's three hundred yards of thick hill in between, and the range is at the top."

"Have you any idea, Mr. Lawless, of who it might have been shooting at that hour? Which would, I suppose, be somewhere between half-past seven and eight o'clock. Is that a usual time for members of the club to be shooting?"

"I'm afraid I can't help you much. I hardly use the club at all. I didn't think myself that there would be anybody there at that time. That's why I went."

"Have you any idea, Mr. Lawless, of who this person or persons shooting might have been?"

I grinned a bit at that. "Certainly," I said. "It was one of the thirty members of the club. I'm afraid I don't know all their names but I could get a list for you quite easily, and let you see it. Shall I?"

I think he was going to ignore that, but just as he opened his mouth, Gethryn put his oar in. He said, not looking at me at all, but out of the window:

"Afraid I can't follow your logic, Mr. Lawless. You're

walking along a road, near a rifle range which you can't see, and which is three hundred yards away from you. You hear a shot and you *know*, not only that that shot was fired on the range but that it was fired by a member of the club." As he finished that he glanced round at me. There was a bit of a smile twisting his mouth but it didn't seem to have reached to the eyes. Damn queer eyes, too. Greenest I've ever seen.

Of course he'd got me. He was quite right. I didn't like him any the more for that. I said:

"Yes, I'll amend my statement. All I could swear to was that there was shooting going on in the vicinity of the range by some person or persons unknown to me."

Gethryn looked out of the window again. "Or persons?" he said. "How many shots?"

I thought about that. I said at last, "I'm sorry, I'm not an automatic cartridge register. I know I heard one and I'll swear to one. I may have heard more, and I'll swear to 'may.'" I think my tone was a good deal ruder than the words, but he didn't seem to bite it. He just grinned a little.

The inspector took on again.

"Mr. Lawless, we agreed just now that the time you passed the rifle range must have been somewhere between seven-thirty and eight p.m. Can you fix this more exactly?"

I held this one for a minute before I answered it. I kept my face blank and thought hard. As a matter of fact I could place the time. After a matter of fifteen seconds' quick thinking I thought I would tell him. I said that on passing Dinwater's clock it showed 7:50, and that therefore when I was opposite the range and heard the shot or shots the time must have been not more than five to eight and not less than seven to eight.

He and the man Gethryn exchanged a look at this. "That's good," said Gethryn. "Shove it down, Inspector." The inspector shoved it down. There was a bit of a silence. I got a sort of feeling that they were waiting for me to say something off my own bat. I may have been wrong, but right or wrong I kept mum. The inspector began to cough and fidget. I guessed a nasty one was coming. It was. He said:

"There's one point in what you told me last night, Mr. Lawless, that you may on reconsideration want to amend. You remember my speaking to you about your luncheon up at the Hall and your most emphatically stating that during that luncheon there was no sign of any strain or unpleasantness whatsoever either between Sir Charles and Lady Grenville or any other persons?"

I had a quick glance at Gethryn. This was very awkward. I gave myself another fifteen seconds' hard thinking and decided to stick to my original saddle. I said:

"What I told you last night, Inspector, was naturally the truth to the best of my belief. I am afraid that so far as I'm concerned, the truth doesn't vary much from one day to another."

"So you mean to say, Mr. Lawless, that you still have it that there was nothing unusual, shall we say, about the behaviour of anyone at that luncheon party?"

"That's right."

Gethryn got up out of his chair and stretched himself. "Well, well," he said. Whether the words were meant to apply to me I can't say, but I got angry just the same. I shut my mouth and hung on to the arms of my wooden chair. Gethryn wandered over to the window and stood beating a little tattoo upon the glass with his fingers. The inspector was silent. Gethryn suddenly swung round. He said to me:

"I say! What did you do in that wood? Beyond smoking a couple of pipes, I mean?"

I shook my head. "Nothing."

He went on looking at me. "A lot of nothing, d'you mean, or on the back down?"

I hung on tighter still to the arms of that chair. I felt I'd like to get up and push his face. I swallowed and said slowly:

"When I say nothing I mean that I sat down and smoked a couple of pipes and thought. What I thought about I can't tell you and probably wouldn't if I could."

"Yes?" he said. "So that was all? A couple of pipes and some free-wheel thinking." He turned back to the window again, looked out for a moment and then, quickly, wheeled back again. "Sure?" he said. "Dead sure?"

I nodded. I couldn't speak or I might have said something I'd have been very sorry for afterward. The inspector leaned forward as if he were going to say something, but a look from Gethryn seemed to shut his mouth, as it were, in mid-air, and then—then, by God, my own memory gave me the biggest shock I'd ever had in my life! Until that moment I'd been speaking, about what I did in that wood, what was to the best of my belief the absolute truth. And now! And now I'd gone and remembered what I did as well as smoke and think. I'd suddenly got a picture of myself cleaning that damn' rifle. I think I must have gone a bit pale. Anyway, I felt all the blood rushing down from my head. It took me about five seconds to decide what to do, but I assure you that in that five seconds I did more thinking than I'd done in the whole morning. I blurted out at last:

"Good God! I *am* sorry! I'd forgotten something!"

Gethryn had been standing very straight by the window.

When I said that, the tenseness seemed to go out of him and he lounged back, leaning against the sill. The inspector said "Ah!" in a tone I didn't like. He looked again at Gethryn and apparently got something he didn't like, for I saw him flush and his mouth shut tight. Gethryn said to me:

"Just tell us what it was, will you?"

"My God!" I said. "I thought the gun could do with a couple of pulls-through, and gave it 'em."

"Any idea of the time?" said Gethryn. "Just roughly speaking."

I thought a minute. "That would be about ten minutes before I started home again, I should say. Twenty minutes' walk . . . Call it nine o'clock to nine-twenty when I cleaned the damn thing. Sorry I can't do better than that."

The inspector made a long, busy-looking note. Gethryn went once more over to the window and began to whistle between his teeth—a most annoying noise. I waited. The inspector seemed to be waiting too, but after he had let a couple of minutes go by—they seemed like months to me—he apparently decided that it was his turn again. He said, and his tone was very different from the almost timid one he had begun this interview with:

"Why did you clean the gun?"

I hope I didn't look as uncomfortable as I felt. "Because it was dirty."

"Why was it dirty? Had you fired it that evening?"

"No."

"That afternoon?"

"No."

"When was the last time you had fired it?"

"Well, I couldn't tell you exactly. I should say somewhere about ten days ago, when I went over and had a day after Mr. George Clark's rabbits."

Gethryn turned round from the window. "With a rook rifle?"

I nodded. "Yes. Unless they've so over-run a place that they really are vermin, I count shooting conies with a scatter-gun in the same category as digging out foxes."

Gethryn walked back to his chair and sat down again, draping one leg over another. He said:

"Shouldn't think a morning's bag would be a big one—unless you're a hot shot."

"Hottish," I said.

The inspector coughed. Gethryn looked at him. "Sorry. Sorry. Carry on." The inspector carried on. He said:

"Since that day, which we can easily verify, when you shot rabbits with this Clark, you haven't to the best of your belief used that gun?" He turned his head this time and stared at my rifle as if it might give him some information. I was getting more and more frightened and therefore more and more angry. I said:

"Best of my belief my foot! I *know* I haven't used the damn thing! All I was uncertain about was the date I shot with Clark."

The inspector leaned further forward over his desk. He seemed to be trying to play the old game Stare You Out. He said:

"Now, then! That tone won't do you *any* good!"

Whether I was going to answer that remark or not I can't tell you. Before I could speak Gethryn answered it for me. He looked at the inspector and said:

"What won't do him which?"

Officialdom grew hot and flustered. "Beg your pardon, sir."

"Never mind. Never mind. Carry on, Inspector. Don't mind me. I keep on forgetting that I ought to be seen and not heard. Sorry!"

I waited for the inspector to begin again. He seemed to have been put thoroughly off his stroke. He hummed and hawed and then coughed and then blew his nose. After that he apparently couldn't think of any more noises, so he said:

"Well, Mr. Lawless, I don't think there's anything else —er—not at the moment, that is. So I needn't keep you any longer."

I got up. I said:

"That's very nice of you indeed. But in return for all the information I've given you, Inspector, perhaps you'd tell me something."

"Eh?" he said. He looked rather as if somebody had stuck a pin into him.

I looked first at Gethryn and then at him. I said at last:

"What I'd like to know is where I stand. Not being either a child of seven or a doddering idiot, I realize——"

I never finished that sentence. Gethryn, who had been sitting near the desk, had some sort of a fumble with a cigarette. It dropped onto his trousers and he jumped up. His knee hit the table, upsetting an ink pot and sending the inspector's notes in all directions. He swore a bit and then said:

"Sorry, Inspector, sorry! Very clumsy!"

He made a great fuss, stamping out the cigarette, brushing his trousers, and hunting about the floor after the notes. The inspector stood up and did things with blotting paper. Out of civility I stooped to pick up one of the pages which was near my feet. As I did so, my head came near to Gethryn's. He didn't seem to move his mouth, but I distinctly heard:

"Shut up and get out."

I straightened and gave the inspector the page I had re-

trieved. He threw away his last bit of sodden blotting paper and looked at me. He said:

"You were saying, Mr. Lawless?"

I thought for a split second. I answered:

"Nothing, Inspector. Nothing. I'm sorry, I'm afraid my temper was a bit on edge with having to cancel a very busy morning's work. I'll get along now."

I got along. Gethryn, who was back again at the window, didn't seem to notice my exit. As I shut the door I heard the inspector begin to talk.

Ordinarily, I'm always glad of an excuse to get into Farningham. It is one of the pleasantest little country towns in my experience, even upon dull days. On this morning, which was blazing hot and yet, with all its heat, fresher than the stifling times we'd been having, it ought to have been delightful. But the sunlight in the old square and the usual pleasant, sleepy bustle of the place had that morning no attractions for me at all. My mind was pretty black; so black that externals, most unusually, had no effect upon me at all. I was worried and sick at heart and puzzled. I couldn't make up my mind whether or not to take the police suspicions seriously; my mind kept ringing on top of all that with that inexplicable remark of Sheila's I had overheard; and, lastly, I couldn't understand this man Gethryn.

I got into the Morris and drove slowly off, out of the square, and down the cobbled slope of the High Street, between the little houses which seemed to lean over the road at the top of their embankments. I had to slow down at the bottom of the hill to let a hay wagon go by, so that I was only going at about three miles an hour when I turned into Bell Street. On the corner, just outside The Compasses, was a long green touring car which I knew. Aviss's. And as I drew abreast of it I saw Aviss himself, standing

on the sidewalk. He waved at me and shouted something, and obviously wanted me to stop. For lack of anything better to do, stop I did, drawing up just ahead of his car. He came trotting up the sidewalk, hailing me and insisting on a drink.

He's got a way with him, has Aviss. Before I knew where I was we were in the cool lounge of the inn.

"I like this burg," said Aviss, when half his pint had gone, "as a rule. This morning I just naturally hate the place's guts." This was so like my own thoughts that I must have looked surprised. His small eyes twinkled at me from behind the huge spectacles. He said:

"You feel that way too?"

I nodded. "Just a bit. Must be liver or something."

"Mine's not liver," he said. "No, sir! Mine's just natural, honest-to-God black rage."

"You don't look much like a man in a rage." I was talking for the sake of talking.

He laughed. "I'm not a man who lets his moods spill over. My temper's a bad one—yes, sir!—but I c'n localize it, which is just as well probably for me and for other people."

"What's the trouble now?" I asked. "Belton again?"

I was joking, but I saw that I'd hit the nail on the head. Belton it was. Aviss's great moon of a face changed just that way I've remarked on before. It looked suddenly like a lump of very aggressive granite. He said very quietly:

"Guess you think I've got a bee in my bonnet about that —that—that—that fine old Canadian gentleman. But say, Lawless, you lissen here!"

I said: "Must I? Have another drink first, anyhow."

"You gotta listen, and to hell with y'r drinks! So looka here, last evening it was hellish hot, wasn't it? And my domestic staff—well, I'd given 'em a holiday. There was

no one in the house, so after I'd been lying on my bed, naked as a baby, sweating in every room in the house all afternoon, I just naturally thought, about half-past six: Earl, this is where you get up, put on some clothes, go out to the garage, take down the top on that car, get into that car and just go so damned fast around this countryside that you beat the Ahlmighty at His own game, and make a breeze f'r y'rself." He leaned forward and tapped me on the knee. "Which, Lawless, is just what I did. And I might tell you I travelled! You know that stretch of main road between Northam and Fielder's Bar? Well, sir, my speedometer—which is on the slow side I'd have you know—was at one stretch along there standing at eighty-one miles an hour. I made a breeze all right! I made such a hell of a breeze that I began to get cold. I'd only got a dust-coat on and underneath a Tux. and no vest, so, when I got into Fielder's Bar I stopped off at The White Lion there and just naturally asked if they could feed a man. The answer was, as it is in most hotels in England, 'No, sir.' If I hadn't had a throat like a flannel rag I'd a walked outa that place without tasting the beer. As it was——"

"You had four quarts and a rusty ham sandwich?"

"No, sir! What I had was a half-pint of bitter. They called it a pint. It was really a half-pint. I oughta know, because the only thing I come to England for every year is the beer. Anyway, I had nothing to eat in that house. It's my belief that nobody ever has had anything to eat in that house, not even the people who live there. They certainly don't look it! No, sir! What I did was to have this half-pint which they called a pint, and to walk straight out of that hotel, across the street, and buy myself at a tea house a coupla comestibles they named 'sausage rolls.' Seemed to me rather like cakes of soap that something had gone an' died in! Yes, sir! I had one mouthful of that

first sausage roll and I just naturally got rid of that before it had got past my molars, and then I drove back. And I drove back slow. And when I say slow, I mean slow."

"What's all this got to do with Belton? For heaven's sake have another drink."

"I never drink. I'm getting to that—to that—to that fine old Canadian gentleman. When I was halfway back my speedometer was showing somewhere around thirty miles an hour—on that straight bit between Fielder's and Northam—I met the—the—the person we're referring to, or rather, he met me. You know the little cross-lane which runs back to that place with the impossible name?"

"Wynfoldingham?"

"Yep. Well, I was proceeding in a leisurely manner on the left-hand side of the main road, and when I gets opposite this turning a blue car, a sports Maxa, comes out of that turning right across me at, well I should put its speed, conservatively, at sixty-five. I do strong-leg stuff on the brakes and swing out right, get into a dry skid, just rattle his off-side hind fender with my near one, turn round about six times, and end up facing the way I'd come. When I'd sorted out my brains I looked round for the Maxa. It had stopped about two hundred yards up the road and the driver—you know who he was, Lawless, because he's the owner and he's that yellow-hearted skunk-rat from the Rockies—was out of the car and looking at that fender I'd touched. I got out of mine and started to walk up the road. I'll say I was ready for a show-down. But what does he do? He gets into the car, backs it and turns it—I suppose he'd been meaning to turn left instead of right when he came out of that turning—and comes by me at about fifty without so much as a toot of the horn, a wave of the hand, or a 'By your leave.' Took me some time to settle myself down. I'da been mad as a bear-cat any-

how, whoever'd been driving that car. To think it was my old friend Canada made me *so* mad, I tell you I daren't start my own car for five or ten minutes. When I did I just drove slowly back to Samsford, pushed the auto into the garage for repair, walked back up home, and went and sat down in my library until I'd cooled off enough to think. When I'd just got myself back into a state of sufficient decency to mingle with my fellow-men, I started off down to The Moon, and what happened down there, as you know, was enough to put a man's thoughts off anything else. Only time I thought of him was when that police captain started confusing me with him. . . . Well, I went to sleep on it and what I decided to do was nothing."

He'd been talking quicker and quicker. I could see him getting worked up again. He actually hoisted his bulk up out of his chair and started to beat with his mug on the table. He said:

"And then! . . . And then! . . . Whaddya know about this? I'm sitting at my breakfast this morning, like a peaceable member of society, just naturally chewing over to myself this Grenville business and thinking that's a nasty job to happen around a nice, quiet little one-horse, one-eyed burg like this, when whaddya think? Perhaps you'll tell me in a minute what you know about this! They bring me in a note from Mr. Guy Bloody Belton, brought round by his gardener, and this note——" He took from his breast pocket an enormous silk handkerchief; he actually had to fan himself before he could go on. He said:

"This note, well, let me be calm! This note says that Mister Guy Belton presents his compliments to Mr. Aviss and begs to take the liberty of informing Mr. Aviss that in view of the fact that Mr. Aviss is obviously unfit to be trusted with the driving of an automobile on the public highways, Mr. Belton intends to take steps to sue him for

his dangerous driving on the previous night on the road between Fielder's Bar and Northam." He slammed the mug down on the table with such a crash that I expected the whole staff of the inn to come running, glared at me as if I were his friend Belton, and said:

"*Whaddya know about that!*"

I looked at him. I said:

"For the Lord's sake sit down, cool off, have a drink and forget it."

"Forget it! Maybe if you'd been driving that tin can of yours and nearly had your young life cut off at the height of its flowering by a dangerous maniac whose guts you'd hated anyhow for the last century, and this maniac was to have the cast-iron, chilled-steel, double-edged gall to say he was going to sue *you* for dangerous driving—maybe then you'd say forget it! Forget it!"

He stood over me like a hill. I got up and edged round him and picked up his tankard and my glass and walked across to the bar window. As the girl opened it and took my order I heard someone come into the room. I looked idly round and saw Gethryn. I couldn't make up my mind whether I wanted to speak to him or not. At first I hadn't been able to stand the fellow, but that business in the inspector's office had had an effect. I nodded; a noncommittal sort of nod. He came straight over to me. He said:

"Thought you might be here. Have a drink?"

I pointed to the glass and the tankard the girl had just put down for me.

"My round," I said. "Have one with me?"

We apparently thought alike on the subject of what to drink on a morning like this. He too had a gin and ginger-beer. With a bit of interior amusement—I rather wanted to see how they'd hit it off together—I took him over to the corner and introduced Aviss. And Aviss, quite un-

consciously, answered a question which had been puzzling me all the morning. He looked at Gethryn with a queer mixture of interest and something which, in any other man, I'd have said was rather awed respect. He said:

"Gethryn? Gethryn? Say, you'll excuse me, sir, I hope, but am I speaking to *the* Colonel Gethryn? Colonel Anthony Gethryn?"

I couldn't tell whether Gethryn was amused, annoyed, or bored. There always seemed to be plenty of expression in that fellow's face. The trouble was you couldn't tell what the expression meant. He said to Aviss:

"Gethryn's right, and Anthony's right, and I'm afraid that once I was a colonel. I've forgotten exactly why."

Americans are persistent and Aviss is a more than average sample. He hoisted his bulk to his feet with that easiness which was always rather surprising. He held out a hand like a leg of mutton and said:

"If you haven't any objection, sir, I should be honoured to shake you by the hand."

"I wonder why?" said Gethryn, but he did grin a bit and he did shake hands.

I must have shown curiosity pretty plainly in my face because Aviss said, looking at me:

"Say, Lawless, you aren't going to tell me that here you are, knowing Colonel Gethryn and not being cognizant of who he is? Say, don't you even scan the papers, or is that Jorrocks guy the extent of your reading?"

Gethryn sat down. He said plaintively:

"Must we have all this?"

"Sure," said Aviss cheerfully. I can never understand how it is that Americans, who are so sensitive in some ways, are mostly quite impervious to that sort of snub. It's simply no good, in my opinion, giving it to 'em. If they

do anything about it at all they seem to like it. Aviss was no exception.

"Sure!" he said again. "D'you think I'd let any friend of mine—I think I can call you a friend, Lawless, we've drunk enough beer together—d'you think I'd let any friend of mine get away with exposing his ignorance? Lawless, Colonel Gethryn is a King Sleuth. He's all the things these guys who write mystery yarns would like to make their——" He cut off the sentence suddenly. He stared at Gethryn with his mouth open. He said:

"If this isn't——Well!" He emptied the new tankard in one swig and beat with it on the table, calling: "Jessee! *Jessee!*" He said:

"Gentlemen, you are now about to drink with me. No refusals entertained. To think that I was only saying a coupla days ago that if anything ever happened in this country it certainly happened a hundred miles from me, and here I am, not only bung in the middle of a murder case but sitting here drinking with a man who's got Scotland Yard out of more trouble than they'd care to tell."

Gethryn caught him up. "Easy on with Scotland Yard!" he said. "Scotland Yard's got the best detective organization in the world. Of course, every now and then they run up against a puzzle whose answer isn't in any book of words; I mean, the sort of case where all their experience and all their organization not only doesn't help them, but actually hinders 'em. In one or two of those I happen to've been lucky, but to say I'm Face-saver-in-Chief to the C. I. D.'s ridiculous."

Aviss interrupted. "That's as it may be, sir. Anyway, we'll drop the subject."

He looked at Gethryn shrewdly and added: "So this Grenville case is a non-routine case, is it? Something out of the rut?"

The girl came then for our order. When she had got it Gethryn said:

"What case is this? That's not the great detective asking a dam-fool question for some obscure reason of his own. It's because I want to know."

Aviss stared. "Stringing me, sir? This murder of Sir Charles Grenville."

Gethryn glanced at me. The look was absolutely idle, but I caught enough from it to know that I'd got to keep quiet. He said:

"Oh, that! I don't know anything about that. You know, Mr. Aviss, every time somebody puts a bullet or a knife or some rat poison into somebody else it isn't a signal for all the bobbies in Great Britain to start looking up my number in the phone book. No. I'm down in this part of the world on holiday."

Aviss pulled a long face. "Well, I'm disappointed," he said. "Whereabouts 're you staying, Colonel?"

"Just the week-end," said Gethryn. He was very vague. "Just the week-end."

Aviss took the hint for once. He began to talk about other things. He was, as he could be when he chose, very entertaining. He got perilously near to the subject of Belton once or twice but I managed to head him off. When we had finished the drinks he had ordered he looked at his watch.

"My gosh!" he said. "Quarter of twelve and there that solicitor gave me an appointment at half-past eleven! Gentlemen, good-day!" He insisted on shaking hands, but he wouldn't stay for the drink that Gethryn offered. He said:

"Another time, I hope. Not now. Lawless'll tell you—I guess he can figure out what I'm seeing solicitors about, and it's a matter very close to my heart. Yes, sir!"

He was gone in a sort of breezing rush. Gethryn looked at me.

"You have another?" he said.

I shook my head. "I must be getting back. I've got another fellow doing my work and I'm sure I'm not going to like the way he's done it!"

He kept on looking at me.

"Straight back to Samsford?" he said.

I nodded.

"Any chance of a few words with you any time to-day?"

I thought about this. I said at last:

"I'd like it. There's a lot of things I——"

"—don't understand," Gethryn put in. "Quite. We might possibly help each other. What time?"

"Where?" I said.

"Your house?" he suggested. "That suit you? Say six-thirty?"

I looked at my diary where I keep jottings of all my appointments.

"Very well," I said.

We went out together. I stood a moment on the sidewalk blinking at the bright sunlight. It was an awful blaze after that shuttered room. As I walked across the sidewalk and got into the Morris, there was a muffled roar, and Gethryn passed me. He was driving a very low, very long, black Voisin-Maxwell. Before I was in second gear he'd got to the end of Bell Street, turned the corner, and was out of sight. I drove home slowly, but even then I only just missed a couple of smashes. I'm afraid my mind wasn't on my driving.

# CHAPTER FOUR

THAT drive, dangerous though it was, did help me to make up my mind; make it up, that is, as far as to decide what I was going to do. And what I was going to do that day turned out not to be work. Before I had lunch I rang up Clayton again and fixed matters with him; he promised to do the only three things that I hadn't been able to put off.

While I was eating I did my level best to make my mind stop running round in those utterly useless circles. I very nearly succeeded because one of the things I'd decided was that I *must* go to the Hall. I might see her or I might not, but at any rate I would have tried. I couldn't see that to go there would do any harm. It couldn't worsen my position, and hers . . . well, here I switched my mind off again.

I'd just finished the meal when an odd thing happened. Mrs. Yule came in. "There's a man at the back, sir," she said. "He's asking for sand, very particular, and Yule's not——"

"Sand?" I said.

"Yes, sir. Silver sand. Seems very urgent-like. Niceish sort of young fellow, sir."

"Stranger?" I said.

"Yes, sir. Says he's very sorry to trouble us, sir, but he thought that maybe as we had a lot of horses and harness and what-not we might be able to let him have a bit of silver sand. I wouldn't have troubled you, sir, only he seemed so particular."

I shut her up. "Tell him all my stuff's plated. Only thing we ever use is Brasso and elbow grease. Sorry."

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir." The old girl backed out of the room.

I don't think she could have got to the end of the passage before I was after her. I couldn't tell you why, but I suddenly thought something was very queer about this silver sand business. Why should a stranger come to my house and ask for silver sand? I mean, you don't go about the countryside, knocking at people's doors, asking for that sort of thing.

I told the old girl not to worry and went out through her kitchen to the yard. The sand merchant was a neatly dressed, clean, thickset fellow of the soldier-servant type. He touched his cap and before I could speak told his story.

"Sorry to trouble you, sir," he said. "I didn't mean them to fetch you, but I was just trying to find someone in the neighbour'ood where I could get hold of such a thing as a drop of silver sand. It's like this, sir. My gentleman—we're visiting in the neighbour'ood, sir,—he was over in Farningham yesterday and he brought back a couple of second-hand Pelhams. Steel they are, and pretty fair condition only a lot of top rust, and he said to me this morning: 'Get these cleaned up.' I think he's been buying a horse off the gentleman we're staying with, sir, and this horse, he's got a theory, is going to go best in a half-moon Pelham. Of which they ain't got none in the harness room. Well, I had a go at these bits with everything I could lay me hands on, but there's nothing I reckon as'll touch this except silver sand, and seeing as I was out for a walk this afternoon and coming through Samsford and knowing you always kept two or three horses and must have some saddlery, I just thought I'd take the liberty——"

I said: "Sorry. All my stuff's plated. Like to have helped you. You ought to try glass paper and goodwill."

He touched his cap again. "Thank you, sir. Sorry to've troubled you. I only wanted to see your man but he was out."

He turned and walked to the yard gate and was gone. I went slowly back through the kitchen. I was quite glad of this silver sand. It was a new little puzzle and one I didn't mind working on. I didn't think much of the story, and the more I considered it, the more certain I grew that for some reason, very obscure, it was all my eye. First, it was an unlikely yarn. Who's going to worry, before he's bought a horse and presumably knows nothing about it, about bitting? Second, if the chap's gentleman was the sort of gentleman to travel with bodyservant-*cum*-groom, the house he was staying at was sure to be a big place, and if it was a big place and horsey, they'd certainly have a half-moon Pelham and equally certainly some silver sand. Third, I'd had a good look at the chap's walk, and I'd have bet a quarter's fees to an old sock that he'd never been across a horse in his life. He'd got the stiff, short-stepped walk of the infantry soldier. . . .

I didn't get much forrader in spite of all my puzzling. In fact, the conclusion I came to could be put in a very few words. It was that here was a funny business and that, as I was in the middle of another funny business, it was ten chances to one that the two funny businesses had something to do with each other.

At three o'clock I took a hat and a stick and started out to walk to the Hall. My mind and my emotions were in such a muddle that I won't even try to give an impression of them, except to say that the net result was the reverse of happy. I didn't turn up the hill to go the West Lodge way this afternoon. I wanted to kill a bit of time so I turned

left and went through the village. I didn't see a soul until I was right past The Moon and past the mill and almost opposite the white gate of the rifle range. On the other side of the road opposite this gate is old Burford's little house, and as I came abreast of it I heard footsteps along the hedge-hidden path to the back. The gate opened, and out stepped my silver sand friend, right almost into my path. He checked abruptly, but if he was, as somehow I felt he was, disconcerted at the sight of me, he hid it very well. There was only just a little flicker of his eyelids and then his square face was impassive again. He touched his cap civilly and waited for me to pass on. But I didn't. I was harassed and unhappy myself and I didn't see why I shouldn't pass even a tenth of this on to somebody else. I stopped and looked at him. I said:

"Any luck this time?"

He smiled rather a deprecating smile, more I think at my tone than at my words.

"'Fraid not, sir," he said. "I'm not having much luck this afternoon."

I didn't take my eyes off his. I said:

"Tell you what you'd better do," and paused.

"Yes, sir?"

"The best thing you can do," I said slowly, "is to think up another yarn. It's not a very good one, that of yours."

Again that flicker of the eyelids, but nothing more; nothing, that is, unless I did see the shade of a suppressed grin. He said:

"Yarn, sir?"

I nodded. "That's what I said. I don't think you'll get the silver sand in any case—unless Dr. Grand's coachman's got some, but I think you'll find yourself less offensive with a better tale."

I left him on that and went on with my walk. About two

hundred yards on, at the crest of the hill just where the church wall begins, I turned round to see what he was doing. He was standing just where I had left him, looking after me. I blasted him in my mind and went on, turning sharp right and walking through the churchyard to the stile which lets onto one of the park rights-of-way. It must have been a marvellous afternoon. There wasn't a cloud in the sky, it was hot, there was more than a suggestion of cool breeze. But on that walk through the fir wood, across Welman's Hollow and so up and into the actual grounds of the Hall I had, increasing with every step I took, a beastly feeling of impending disaster which turned the sunlight into grayness and the trees and grass and flowers into so many dusty trappings not fit to be looked at.

As I got within sight of the main entrance my carefully fostered courage began to ooze very quickly away. I believe that if I hadn't happened to see a gardener who touched his hat to me I should have turned tail and bolted, but as he was there and had seen me I had to go on. I rather blessed his existence really.

Bland, who is so human that according to dramatic standards he should never have been a butler, opened the door. My voice, when I asked whether Lady Grenville was at home, sounded to me like a hoarse, fear-inspired rattle, but if he noticed anything unusual he gave no sign of it. He smiled benevolently. He said:

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Lawless, her ladyship's engaged."

His voice had a friendly and sympathetic ring. Bland and I have been great friends ever since the time I won at Hillingdon on Blackfire. I tipped him off about it beforehand and I believed the old man won quite a packet. I suppose my wretchedness and disappointment must have shown, because he wavered. He said:

"I don't know, sir, if there's any likelihood of—whether

her ladyship——P'r'aps, Mr. Lawless, if you'd like to come in and wait a few minutes——"

I did like, although I was by this time in such a state of nerves that half of me wanted most desperately to take advantage of the situation and bolt. I think it must have been the other half's scorn of such cowardice that made me go in. Bland showed me into the little room they call, for some reason I don't think anyone has ever known, the Watch Room, but he didn't go out. He hovered. This suited me well enough. Somebody to talk to and somebody decent was for me at that moment just what the doctor ordered. He wouldn't naturally open a conversation himself so I had to do it for him, and I asked him something which since ten o'clock last night had been shouting in my mind for an answer. I said:

"Bland, how is her ladyship? I mean——"

"Yes, Mr. Lawless." The old fellow picked up a silver cigarette box and fiddled with it. "Yes, Mr. Lawless," he said again, "I mean, sir, that I know what *you* mean. . . . Her ladyship, sir, is, well, just as anyone who knows her might expect. So brave that it makes old fellows like me feel ashamed of themselves."

I nodded. I couldn't look at the old boy because for some time I had had an uneasy feeling that Bland knew more of my state of mind in regard to his mistress than I would have liked anyone to know. Not that it mattered exactly, but . . .

I looked at my watch. It was five minutes to four. I said:

"Look here, Bland, d'you really think it's any good my waiting? I mean, perhaps even when I have waited she—her ladyship won't want to see me. She probably——"

The old man helped me out. "I could ask her, sir, as soon as she is disengaged."

I asked quite an unforgivable question, but as I say, Bland and I were old friends.

"Who's with her?" I said. "Tell me off if you want to."

He smiled. "It's a gentleman, sir. I'm afraid I don't know who, because I was off duty when he called and Thomas let him in. All I know about him is that he's got a gray hat."

I nodded absently. Ever since I'd entered the house something had been worrying me and now I discovered what it was. This, however well the stage had been set, was not a house of real mourning. In fact, if anything, the feel of the place was somehow lighter and easier than I had ever known it. That's a very bad shot at describing what I mean, but I can only hope that it won't look like utter nonsense.

I had, sitting there in that room, literally to work out in my mind how long it was since Grenville had been killed. From the atmosphere of the house it might have been a month instead of fifteen hours or so. I must say, though, about the calculation, that I even gave myself a bit of a shock. Fifteen hours! And here was I, expecting to see the wife of a man suddenly killed so little time ago. . . .

And yet she was engaged and with somebody else. That meant that see people she would. I fought down my first impulse of horror at my own behaviour and stuck it out. Bland left me, murmuring something. I got up and walked about the room, smoking cigarette after cigarette. By my watch I was alone in the room for twelve minutes. It seemed to me like half a day. I hated the room; I loved the room. Some sense that I can't ever try to classify told me insistently that she herself had been here, and recently. That restless ache and miserable, uncontrollable longing just for even a moment's sight of her had me at their mercy as never before.

The door opened and Bland came back. One look at his face was enough for me. He shook his head sorrowfully but didn't say anything. A dear old man, Bland. I didn't say anything either. I'm afraid it was because I couldn't. I picked up my hat and stick and went out.

He managed to pass me as I went across the hall and he held the door open. I came out into the sunshine and didn't feel it. By the grace of God I got down the steps without an accident, but I can swear that as I was walking down the drive it was only instinct which kept me on the gravel. When things began to clear a bit—it's amazing what disappointment, of that beastly kind anyhow, will do to a man!—I found myself halfway down toward the first gates. The gardener that I had seen when I came up was still working. Again he touched his hat and this time he said something. I didn't catch it, but I nodded and walked on. I suppose it was about fifty yards after this that I got a shock. I hadn't heard anything, but suddenly a hand dropped on my shoulder from behind. My nerves were in such a state that I almost jumped out of my skin.

"Sorry," said a voice, "sorry! Fool thing to do!"

It was Gethryn. That shock did me good in a way. It certainly cleared my head, for the first thing I did was to look at his hat. It was a gray one, and although there are a great many gray hats in the world and even in Samsford, I would have bet both my best horses to a packet of gaspers that this gray hat was the gray hat that Bland had seen. I was annoyed. A man is when he has been frightened. I said:

"Keep your bloody hands to yourself! What d'you think you're doing—playing tag or something?"

He grinned at me and I think it was from that moment that I began to like the fellow. This time his smile was a real smile. He said:

"I've already said I'm sorry."

I asked him: "How d'you look when you're pleased?"

"Quite the opposite," he said. "So mysterious," and then his face changed. The smile went off it as if some invisible sponge had wiped it away. He said: "What're you doing here?"

That smile of his had somehow changed everything. If he had asked me that question in that place four hours before, I might have hit him and taken my chance, although he was probably three inches and a stone and a half above my class. As it was, though, I simply said:

"Trying to do what you've apparently succeeded in."

He looked at me rather oddly. He said:

"I'm sorry. But I couldn't know you were coming."

That's the thing about that fellow, he always knows what you mean even if you don't say it. He said, after waiting for me to answer, which I didn't:

"Might as well come back now instead of at half-past six?"

I nodded. We had just passed through the first gates—that is, the gates which lead on to the formal drive from the park. There was a car there; that black, wolfish-looking car of his. Why he hadn't taken it up to the house, I can't think. If I had come that way, of course, I should have seen it and not gone to the house and probably this story would have been different.

He walked over to it, and my memories of the time from the moment he said "Hop in" to the time when we drew up at my house—which, by the way, he knew how to find without any instructions from me—are just a blur in my mind—rather like a travel film shown by a drunken operator whose only ambition is to get through a one-reel film as quickly as he can. My first real coherent memory after sitting down in the car, which I must say is comfort-

able, is hearing Gethryn say as we pulled up at my gate:

"Something up with her to-day. Not going at all well. Nice house."

I put my foot gingerly to the ground and said:

"And inside there's some nice whisky, thank God!"

He followed me in, and I took him to the room which has never had a name yet, even from Mrs. Yule, whose chief despair in life it is. I took a drink myself. I needed it so badly, what with everything and then that nightmare road race on top of it, that manners had gone by the board, and I said: "Help yourself. I'm sorry but I can't wait."

He helped himself. Rather modestly I thought. And then we sat down, he in my big chair and I on the edge of a table, and looked at each other. There was a long silence, so long that it seemed to me that we were playing that game that all kids play, Silence in the Pig Market.

He's got an extraordinary mind, that fellow. He suddenly said:

"Pork or no pork, here goes! Ask me and I'll tell you."

I stared at him. I knew what he meant but I couldn't believe that he had said it. I said:

"Ask you what?"

"Ask me what the devil I'm doing in this business, what I meant by all my cinema stuff in the police station this morning, and, generally, what the hell."

I think it was about then that I began to wonder why I'd ever been such a silly ass as not to like this man. I said:

"What the hell, then?"

"I'll tell you," he said. "I'm a man, thank God, who's got too much money and nothing to do. Because I've been useful to the authorities some half-dozen times in finding the answers to rather unusual riddles for 'em, I'm blessed, or cursed, whichever way you look at it, with an aura which seems to breed crimes, generally of violence. . . .

What I mean, Lawless, is that wherever I go—and always in the most unlikely places—I tumble into the middle of some unsavoury wrong-doing. And whenever I do, there's always some blasted bobby near by, who's either heard some tall stories about me from one of his friends or has read some far taller stories in some newspaper or other ——"

I cut him short. I'd suddenly had a wave of memory. I almost shouted:

"Good God! You're the chap that saved that fellow, what was his name? Ex-pug, Bruisem, Basher—Bronson. You saved Bronson when they were just going to hang him by finding out that he didn't do it at all."[1]

Gethryn nodded. "I did. More, I should say, by luck than judgment. D'you know, Lawless, I don't like being reminded of that job. It's the only one of these jobs that I haven't really enjoyed."

I didn't like that much. I said so. I said:

"Meaning to say you're enjoying this one. Well, I'm not, and I don't care who knows it. I'd swap places with a blind jockey with a paralyzed arm who's got to ride a puller in the National. And that sounds like a joke, but I mean it!"

I suppose I expected him to answer straightaway. Anyhow, I remember that there was rather a nasty feeling about the silence which followed. I don't know how long it went on for, but that doesn't matter. I know it was long enough to make me feel uncomfortable because all the time he was looking at me. It wasn't a stare and it wasn't an abstracted glance. It was just a steady *look* and at the end of it, without switching his eyes off mine, he said:

"I suppose you didn't kill Grenville, did you?"

---

[1]See *The Noose.*

It's a funny thing to say, but I didn't mind that at all. I shook my head.

"No," I said.

Another silence, not quite so long as the first and not quite so uncomfortable, but all the same for that, long enough and awkward enough. Gethryn broke it again. He said:

"Would you have liked to? . . . It's all right, there aren't any witnesses."

I thought over that. I said:

"I'd like notice of that question."

He shook his head. "You can't have it." And he waited. I think it's a good indication of the trust I'd suddenly got in this man that I answered:

"Yes." And then added: "If I could have done it without any possibility of being found out."

He smiled a bit at that, that queer smile that went up one side of his face and left the other as grave as it had been before.

"It's an odd thing," he said, "that's the sort of answer that gives you real truth, and yet if you had said it in a court of law they'd all be against you either for flippancy or for double-crossing. Or, possibly, for meaning it."

A question occurred to me, a question which had to have an answer at once. I stood up. I said:

"Look here! What the devil made you ask me that?"

"Here," he said, "is your own back. I'd like notice of that question."

"Why?"

He brought his gaze back from my book-shelves to look at me. He said:

"If I give you no answer you won't like it. If I give you the wrong one you'll know it's wrong, and if I give you the right one we might have a row."

I stared. A very queer feeling came over me. I felt as a man might feel who, when he has done a crime which he imagines secret, finds suddenly that all the time he has been observed by dozens of eyes. I sat down again, rather heavily I think. I said:

"All right. Shoot!"

He kept on looking at me. "Mean it?"

I nodded. He stood up now. He wandered over to my bookcase and for a moment stood with his back to me, fiddling with this volume and that, but he turned round at last. He said:

"I asked you that question because, however much you may disbelieve it, it's pretty common knowledge that you, Michael Lawless, are in love with Sheila Grenville."

When I set out to write this story I made up my mind that it was no good writing it if I wasn't honest all the way through, and so I'll be honest now. But in order to be honest I've got to use a phrase which has been so hackneyed that it is almost laughable. I am going to say—and I'd like you to understand that I really mean it—that "everything went black." I must have said something—I don't remember what it was—because I heard Gethryn's voice again. He was saying:

"Yes, bit of a shock. True, I suppose?"

I lost my temper a bit at that. I said:

"Yes. And why the devil not?"

"No reason at all, my dear fellow. In fact, it would be rather astonishing if you hadn't. No, no. I don't mean that I know anyone who's followed your example. I only mean that I understand."

I got up from where I was sitting. I didn't want to stand, but equally I felt that I couldn't bear to be still. I said:

"Look here, I'm going to ask you a question too. In effect I've asked it of you already, and, rather cleverly,

you gave me an answer which wasn't an answer at all. What I want to know is this: Where do you come in on this business—exactly? I'll make it clearer. Are you official or aren't you official? Is anything I may say likely to be taken down and used as evidence against me? Do you have warrants in your left hip pocket and handcuffs in your right? Are you a friend or a nark? Or are you six of one and half a dozen of the other, sitting on the fence waiting to see which way the cat jumps?"

He took that very decently. He said, without any of his half-grins or funny ways:

"I'm a private person who has once or twice shown a certain aptitude for solving puzzles of the Cock Robin order. I came down here to stay with old Sir Humphrey Bleydon as a perfectly detached and ordinary week-end visitor. I happened to go to Samsford Hall, as you know, to lunch yesterday—the day that Grenville was killed. The chief constable of the county's away in the south of France. Bleydon, who it's unnecessary to tell you is the lieutenant of the county, suggested to county police headquarters that as I was here they'd better make hay while the sun shone, and get me in on it. I was bored black in the face and said yes. I'm afraid that I've arrived at that deplorable sort of condition at which I rather like this sort of thing. The first I knew about the case was the local rag's special account this morning, half an hour's talk with Inspector Cross also this morning, and then your interview with him in the police station. What I know now is a bit more. I know you didn't do it, and"—He seemed to pause a little here—"I've had a talk with Lady Grenville. Beyond that there's nothing to tell yet."

"Sure?" I said, and looked at him. I had a sudden, almost dazzling wave of intuition. Quite illogical, utterly

unreasonable. I had suddenly achieved an *idée fixe* that the respectable servant who wasn't a groom and who was so persistent in his singular request had something to do with this facet of the business.

Gethryn returned my look. I couldn't read his eyes, any more I suppose than anyone ever had been able to —if he didn't want them read.

"Meaning?" he said.

I was as curt. "Silver sand."

He put back his head and laughed. "Clumsy devil, White," he said. "But it was a bad shot on my part. I ought to've made his story up for him. I suppose he had some ridiculous yarn."

I grinned too. Somehow I couldn't help it. I said:

"He did pretty well. If I hadn't had so many queer things happen to me in such a short time that just one more was bound to make me think, I'd never have rumbled him. As it was, I did. I suppose you've seen him?"

He shook his head. "Not yet. He'll be waiting for me."

I began to get interested. So interested that almost I'd forgotten that sick emptiness which yet was a pain. I said:

"What is this silver sand stuff, anyhow?"

He got up and began to wander about my room. He took out his case and lit a cigarette. He said:

"Business by great detective. He indicates by walk and actions that he is wondering whether to answer question or not. So! He decides. Answer question he will." He walked round and stood to face me, his hands buried deep in his trousers pockets, the cigarette in one corner of his mouth. He rocked a little from heel to toe. He said:

"When you examined that stiff last night, did you look at his back?"

I shook my head. "Only the head and the wound. I'm

not a policeman. I'm not even a doctor nowadays. I saw he was dead and I saw how he'd died, and that's all I worried about."

Gethryn nodded. "Exactly. And all I worried about when they took me in to see him all nice and tidy on his marble slab was everything else except the obvious. If I've got a job, that's it. The un-obvious. I made them turn him over. By some miracle of luck—luck for me, not for X—there were still traces of what must have been a quantity——" He stopped.

"Silver sand?" I said quickly. I'd begun to get really interested.

He nodded. "Yes. I turned up his coat collar at the back. A thick Harris tweed coat it was, if you remember. Underneath the collar I found a little patch of glittering stuff. I got permission to take it off, and blew it into an envelope. When I got home I found it was silver sand. Unusual cag to find under the coat collar of a dead brewer. Everything else one expects; fluff, tobacco ash; even half a bull's eye wouldn't have been so queer, especially as I found very quickly that there was no silver sand used either in the interior domestic offices at the Hall or the exterior, or anywhere at the Hall at all for that matter."

I thought a moment. "No, you're right. Silver sand belongs to stables, and there they use plated stuff. If I had all that money I'd use all steel and make the blighters burnish it."

Gethryn took out his case again, chose a cigarette and lit it. He said:

"Question A: Why silver sand? Question B: Where silver sand? Question C: How silver sand? The answer at first seems to be a lemon, but they're at least the sort of questions that make one think, in order to get something more satisfactory."

He walked over and sat down at my writing desk. He took out a fountain pen and pulled a blank block of scribbling paper toward him. He said over his shoulder:

"Come here and I'll show you something."

I crossed the room and stood behind him, looking down at what he was drawing. He said:

"Now—this dotted line is the mill stream. Here—the cross—is The Moon. The heavy line's the road through Samsford. R's the rifle range; C's the church; D—and it may be important—is the big oak behind The Moon. Here—this hatched line—is the park wall, running all down parallel with the village. Here, let's call it X, are the steps over the gap in the wall which ends the right-of-way just opposite The Moon. Follow?"

I said that follow I did. As a matter of fact, it was a very good little plan. He went on drawing. He said:

"Here, where this T is, is where our Mr. Welby picked up the body, just at the foot of the steps on the park side of the wall."

He put down the pen and swung round in my swivel chair, tilted it back and looked up at me. He said:

"Don't know whether you've considered it. P'r'aps you don't even know what Mr. Welby's got to say about the position of the body."

I shook my head. I didn't know. I began to realize what a dud I'd been to sit in that place with Aviss and drink and talk and try to pretend nothing unpleasant had happened.

"Grenville, Welby says, was lying on his right side. That's to say on the side opposite from that on which he was shot. He was right at the foot of the steps and those steps lead up to a gap in the wall. I think you'll agree that the bullet which killed him came from a fair distance away. At least more than the few feet which are between

the bottom of the steps and the thickness of the park wall."

I nodded. "Yes. You can't swear to these things, of course, but I'd say—and I've seen a good few stiffs in my time—that the shot that killed Grenville was fired from at least fifty yards' range. I'd swear, anyway, and so would any doctor or even an expert, that that bullet wasn't fired from anything as near as the wall. Go on."

Gethryn went on. "Have you thought what this means?" He seemed to be waiting for an answer, so I did think. And after I had thought I said:

"It means that whoever shot Grenville shot him"—I said all this very slowly because I was keeping the plan of Samsford in my head as I spoke—"it means that whoever shot Grenville shot him from somewhere directly opposite the gap in the wall over which the steps go, and outside the park. D'you want me to go on like this?"

Gethryn made a little, rather impatient gesture with his hand. It indicated plainly that he did. I said:

"He couldn't have been shot from *inside* the park because, as you've shown on your plan, the wall juts back for six feet so near to the southern side of the steps that if anyone had shot him as he was facing the steps, shooting along the wall, the shooter would have had to be so close that the wound would have been quite different. Also, he couldn't have been shot from inside the park while he had his right side to the steps, because of that steep bank which leads up to the fringe of the copse. Anyone wanting to shoot would have had to be on top of that bank, and if he had shot from the top of that bank he might have hit Grenville in the left temple all right, but the bullet couldn't 've come out of a corresponding spot on the right side of his head. It would have come out somewhere under the right jaw, owing to the angle. . . . That right?"

"Holmes, this is wonderful."

I grinned. "Isn't it? What d'you want me to do it for, then?"

"My dear fellow, I only joked because it's so refreshing to find somebody who can separate A from B, and B from C so that he doesn't get so tied up that he doesn't know what he's talking about. That's what I've been going through the whole morning. What you get, then, is this. That Grenville was shot from the outside of the park, through the gap in the wall over which the steps go, and from a point which must have been approximately level with Grenville's head. That gives us a lot of play, doesn't it?"

"You mean," I said, "because he might have been shot before he actually mounted the step or steps, or when he was on any one of the steps. How many are there? Let's think."

We didn't have to think. "Five," said Gethryn.

There was a small silence. I said at the end of it:

"Wait a minute though! The bullet went in at the left temple, didn't it? Now, I knew Grenville. He wasn't the sort of man to go up those steps like a crab. He'd go up like a human being—one, two, three, four—facing the gap. So I work it out like this: Either he was shot before he started to climb the steps at all, when, say, he was looking along the wall to the right for some reason or other, or at the top of the steps, when he was doing the same thing. Not when he was on steps 2, 3, or 4. That seem sound?"

"Several bells! Now then, Lawless, make a picture in your mind. You know this place. Think of that ten-foot brick wall, then of the conformation of the country, the lie of the village and that ten-foot-wide gap for the steps, in which the top of the wall is only four feet from the ground.

Got it? . . . You have? Right! Now, where could that shot have come from?"

I must say I gaped at that. I don't think I'm a fool; in fact, I know without conceit that I'm quicker-witted than most. But I suppose it had been my own almost exterior troubles which had prevented me from seeing all this before. I snapped my teeth together and shut off the gape. I hoped this Sexton Blake hadn't seen it. I said:

"If he had been standing at the bottom of the steps and one allows for that slope down, which is a lot bigger than it seems, a shot from the top floor of The Moon would just about fit in. If he had been standing at the top of the steps I can't see . . . Yes, I can though! . . . There's just one way it could be done, and that's from about the fourth big branch of the oak in the paddock behind The Moon. Nowhere else'd fit in. Nowhere else in the world. That what you're driving at?"

I never got an answer to that question. There was a rap on the door. For the first time in years Mrs. Yule didn't wait for me to say "Come in." She was with us almost before we had heard the knock. I could see that the poor old dear was excited. She was white and trembling and yet there was obviously in her agitation an ingredient of delighted pleasure. She was panting so that she could hardly get her words out, but she made a noble effort. She started, in fact, before I had time to ask her what she wanted. She said:

"Sir . . . Sir . . . liberty . . . message . . . he sent a message up . . . if there's anything you could do . . . well, he'd be glad——"

The poor old soul broke off here and stood shaking like a jelly, quite obviously thinking that she had conveyed some coherent meaning. I pushed a chair at her. I said:

"You sit down, Mrs. Yule. Take eight deep breaths,

take away the number you last thought of, and have another shot."

She sat down—perhaps collapsed would be a better word. We watched her while she very creditably rose to the occasion and conquered her emotions. When she spoke again there was no doubt as to her meaning. She said:

"It's Mr. Dinwater, sir, from The Moon. His girl's just come up with a message from her Dad, 'Would Mr. Lawless see what he could do for Mr. Dinwater?'" Her excitement began to grow again. The words came quicker and quicker. She spluttered:

"They've taken 'im, sir, and it wasn't old Morley neither. It was an inspector and a sergeant from Farningham. Taken 'im off in a van, they 'ave. . . . And 'im such a nice-spoken fellow."

I cut her short. I said:

"Mrs. Yule, are you trying to tell me that they've arrested Dinwater?"

She moved her head so quickly up and down that for the first time in six years I realized that all that gray hair didn't belong to her. She said:

"Yes, sir. And 'im so fond of Sir Charles an' all! Yule says he reckons that inspector must be daft."

I looked at Gethryn. He said:

"Why so astonished? Think of what you've just been saying."

I thought. "Good Lord!" I said.

"But I say," said Gethryn. I switched my eyes back to him from the heaving masses of Mrs. Yule. He said:

"But follow your own advice; take away the number you last thought of."

# CHAPTER FIVE

FUNNILY enough, I slept that night. I got into bed as I had the night before, quite sure that I'd have to read myself through until five or six, when I might get an hour if I was lucky. As it turned out, however, no sooner had I actually got into bed about eleven, than I went dead off. I waked at seven, with the light still on, and *Mr. Sponge* still open on the pillow.

I felt, as you can imagine, very much better. It was another wonderful day and this morning I began to realize the sunshine again. I leaned out of the window and listened to my pigeons making their fat *carroo*-ing and old Yule whistling lugubriously "The Song of the Sea" while he rattled about with a bucket. In the boxes Daisy and the little bay hunter I had decided not to turn out to grass were adding their quota to these pleasant morning sounds. While I dressed I felt as I remember feeling at school on the last day of term—almost sick with excitement. For I knew what I was going to do as soon as the clock would let me. I was going to speak to Sheila on the telephone. I had a cold bath and shaved and dressed and was very leisurely about it all. I got down to breakfast exactly when Mrs. Yule was bringing it in. While I ate we gossipped. There's nothing the old girl likes better than to stay and watch me eating what she has cooked, while I listen to her version of everything that hasn't happened in Samsford. This morning of course she was full of Dinwater's arrest. I'm afraid I must confess that most of it went into my right ear and came out of the left. Unreasonably I was much too happy to worry myself just yet

about other people. That could all wait. I worked out that I must start to get my day's work done at half-past ten. I couldn't decently ring up the Hall much before that, so had to cool my heels in the stables until ten-fifteen, and then I made a dart for the house, shut myself in with the telephone, took four deep breaths and asked for the number. I can't tell you why, but I was quite certain that I was going to speak not only to the Hall but to Sheila herself. I did. I suppose she must have been sitting in one of the rooms where there was a telephone, because it was she who actually answered the ring. I'm afraid I've got rather a habit of shouting over the phone as a rule but I can assure you I didn't shout that morning. I had to keep my voice very low so that it wouldn't—as I felt it might any moment—give me away. I said:

"It's Lawless speaking."

"I know," said the telephone.

Everything that I had been going to say, all my carefully rehearsed speech, even, I completely forgot for one awful moment, and anything else to put in its place seemed to have gone out of my head. What I did get out was:

"I—I—came up to see you yesterday——"

The telephone interrupted. "I know. I'm sorry I had a business interview and wasn't free."

I said: "I was going to ask . . . What I came to ask . . . What I mean is; perhaps it's a foolish question . . . but . . . but . . . is there anything I can do for you? It's no good saying all the things——"

And again I was interrupted. I began to feel, although I fought desperately against it, a cold, dead chill taking the place of my perhaps rather unreasonable happiness. She said:

"That's very kind of you. I'm afraid there . . . there . . . isn't anything."

There was a silence. I tried to say something but couldn't. It wasn't so much what she was saying as some indefinable quality in her tone. I can't describe it to you. She seemed to relent a little. She spoke again. She said:

"Of course, if there is anything, I . . . I . . . I'd let you know at once."

There was just one thing I wanted to say—"When can I see you?"—but I couldn't get the words out. I don't know why, but I'd always assumed, somehow, though God knows she never gave anyone cause to think so, that she hadn't been very happy with Grenville. She was, for one thing, at least twenty-seven years his junior; for another, it had always seemed to me that anyone even looking at the two together must see that they could have nothing in common. They couldn't even meet over horse-flesh. Grenville neither knew nor cared which end of a horse went first.

To save that awful and inevitably final click of a disconnection, I forced out some words. I said:

"I hope the mare's going on all right."

"Thank you," said the telephone. "Very."

I said:

"You must forgive me. I see now that I oughtn't to have worried you." I'd got one of those sudden unreasonable flares of rage a man only gets with the one person he would give anything never to rage against. I said:

"If I *am* needed, no doubt Grimstock will let me know. Good-bye!"

I slammed the receiver onto its hook, only a second later to snatch it off again in the desperate hope that perhaps she hadn't yet rung off.

Of course she had.

I went downstairs four at a time and bellowed for Mrs. Yule in a voice that brought her running. I took up my book and looked at it. I told her, in a voice which sent her

off to the telephone as quick as she had come from the kitchen, to ring up Crawford and Knowles and tell them that I couldn't get over that morning, but that I would come in the afternoon. I went up the stairs again even quicker than I had come down. I tore off my flannels and crammed myself into a pair of breeches and boots. Out of my bedroom window I bellowed to Yule to put a saddle and bridle on the bay and take him out into the paddock.

"And bring a lunging rein with you," I said.

He just pulled that entirely imaginary forelock and set off about the business, but I could see from his very walk that he thought me mad. Perhaps I was a bit that morning.

There's a gap in my memory here. I've tried hard to remember, not that it much matters except to me, finishing my dressing and going out and mounting that little pig, but I can't. The next thing I really recollect, after yelling to Yule, was coming a most unholy mucker over the old oak trunk at the corner of the paddock which for years had served me as a natural jump. I didn't let go of my friend; I still had just enough grip on the single rein to prevent him getting away. I picked myself up and began to take grass and grit out of my eyes and mouth with my free hand. I'd got a hell of a bruise on my left shoulder and a fair rattling up, otherwise I was all right. Yule came running as fast as his completely parenthetic legs would carry him. I could tell by the twist of his mouth and the rather more vibrant than usual quality of his almost perpetual hissing that he was frightened. He said:

"Didn't I tell 'ee! That dorm thing's no good to God nor man. Why else d'ye think young Varney let you have 'im for seven pund ten, or whatever it was?"

I spat out the last bit of grass and felt my teeth to see if they were wobbly. They weren't. I said:

"You shut up! And it wasn't seven pound ten either. It

was twenty-five, and if looks count for anything, he's going to be worth four times that. I'll *make* him, and then some! Here! Stop hissing and just tighten these girths a bit and put that lunging rein down. He doesn't like the look of it."

I was up again in a couple of minutes. There's no doubt about it, that horse could move. I let him cut round the paddock three times at full speed and then I headed him for the tree again. I must say young Varney had told me he was a pig, and a pig he was! I don't mind that blood sort that won't jump in cold blood, but I did mind this gentleman. He gave no intimation of refusal at all. I should say that when he did stop his nose was only about an inch from the trunk, and having stopped and got you well forward his next little trick was to stand right up, spin round, and go off like hell in the other direction. It took me half the length of the paddock to pull him up. We were just close to Yule.

"Tould 'ee!" said the old man. "You send that 'un along to Farningham market. It'll fetch three pun' ten for cat's meat. That's the lad as'll break your neck and 'is own too."

I told him to shut up. I also told him to go into the house and get a kosh. He went off at a rapid waddle. While he was gone I let my friend cut round and kick his heels to his heart's desire. The more he played up the better I liked it that morning. There's nothing like being on a bad one to stop yourself from thinking about anything except yourself and him.

Yule came out again with one of my canes. I pulled up close to him and took it. I just shoved my heels in and off we went. I took the horse round left-handed so that he had practically two hundred yards to go before he came to the jump. As we came into the straight facing it, I gave him one for luck. And that was the first time I was really

certain that that horse was going to win me a lot of money. By God, he *could* go! Ten yards off the tree he was going so fast that a pull-up was impossible, even for him, and I gave him another for luck. And then I must say that I closed my eyes. I thought of that last mucker of twenty minutes ago and worked out that this would be the great-uncle to that. But it wasn't. He took that tree, which is no mean jump, just like a swallow. I don't think I've ever sat on a bigger or better jump in my life. From the way he leaped, although it wasn't uncomfortable, you'd have thought the dome of St. Paul's was in front of him and not an old tree. Funnily enough, as soon as he had done it, almost as soon as his hooves touched grass, he became a different horse, for the moment anyhow. He didn't tear on, but dropped to a canter. I eased him down and he trotted like something that had been in the show ring all its life. We came to a gentle halt just by the gate. Yule was standing there. I said:

"What about that, you old grouser?"

He shook his head mournfully, but with a gleam in his eye. He said:

"Once he'll do it and twice he'll do it. The third time maybe he'll break your neck *and* 'is own!" And then he jerked his thumb over his shoulder toward the house. "There's a gen'lem'n," he said. "Some name like Sufferin'."

I've known Yule for many years. It's absolutely useless to expect anything at all like anybody's name from him. I couldn't think who it was. I said:

"How long's he been there?"

"Just come when I went for stick."

I laughed. "And you wanted to see whether the blighter'd jump before you told me!" I slipped off. "Here, you take him in and look after him. They're going to hear about him at Hillingdon next season."

He shook his old bald head. "Break your neck and 'is own afore that," he said, but I could see him eyeing the horse as he led it away. The worse things Yule said about an animal, the better he really liked it.

I walked fairly leisurely back to the house. I expected some visitor with a sick poodle. What I found was Gethryn. I saw him as I went up the path through my little rose garden. He was standing at the open French windows of my room. He said as I came up:

"Going to run that thing?"

I nodded.

He said: "Send me a postcard when you do, will you? . . . And now come here and give me a drink and listen while I tell you things."

I gave him a drink and took one for myself. He sat at my desk and looked at me. He said:

"Dinwater. . . . D'you know, Lawless, when I started this business I didn't think it was going to be half such a funny business as it's turning out to be. What d'you know about Dinwater? Likely killer?"

I shrugged. "Goodish sort of fellow of his type." I thought a minute. "I couldn't say about his being a killer. He's not an easy bird to understand, I should think. . . . If I were being paid for this I think I should say that Mr. Dinwater might kill somebody if he disliked them enough or if they were dangerous enough to him, but I think it rather improbable that he killed Grenville. He'd worked with Grenville, you know, and Grenville had got him that job as licensee of The Moon."

Gethryn nodded. "I know. What the bobbies have done is rake up quite a respectable case against him, though. If Mr. Dinwater didn't kill Grenville, Mr. Dinwater's either been a blasted fool or someone else has been getting clever."

I sat down in a chair and put my legs over its arm. I said:

"What have they got against him exactly? . . . By gosh! Now I come to think of it, he was behaving rather—well, a bit odd as you might say—on the night, and he told me they'd taken his gun away as well as mine, and he seemed agitated."

"If it comes to it," Gethryn said, "Rex v. Dinwater's based on this: A month ago exactly Dinwater was heard talking to Grenville at the park wall. Grenville had been walking with a couple of dogs. Dinwater was in his shirt-sleeves, and had therefore apparently bolted over the bridge from The Moon to get a word with Grenville. Grenville stood at the bottom of the steps almost exactly where his body was found the other night. Dinwater was beside him a little to the left of the steps. They didn't know it, but one of the under-keepers—a boy called Marsh—was hidden in the brushwood at the top of that steep slope leading up to the copse. He'd just found a snare and was taking it out and wondering whose work it was, when he heard the voices. Haven't seen Mr. Marsh myself, but what he heard—he evidently got so interested that he stuck it out to the last, unless he's a most unusually vigorous liar—stuck in his mind and has now got so apposite that he felt impelled to come and tell the policemen all about it. According to him, Grenville and Dinwater were having a row; that's the first curious thing. You don't expect to have rows between very expensive landed baronet brewers and little men who look after small public houses. At least, if you do, the rowing should be all on the side of the baronet brewer, whereas, Mr. Marsh has it, this row was the other way round. It was Dinwater who was going for Grenville. The disappointing thing about it is that Marsh couldn't make out what the row was about. He apparently only heard words here and there and some of those he didn't un-

derstand. All he got was the general trend of the situation.

"Cross—that's your inspector—says that what Marsh has got to tell boils down to this: that Dinwater was going for Grenville because he, Grenville, apparently had made, a long time before, some promise which he hadn't carried out. Grenville, before he finally got angry and threatened Dinwater with dismissal and other things, seemed almost frightened of Dinwater. Not physically of course, because the difference in size was tremendously in his favour, but morally, as if Dinwater could, if he liked, be very dangerous. There was a good deal of what Marsh apparently calls 'improper language'—seems an unpleasantly smug young man—and also, interesting incident Number Two, a lot of words which he swears were not in a foreign language but which he can't reproduce for our benefit, and couldn't at the time understand.

"Mr. Marsh we'll call Point One in the case against Dinwater. Point One, because I don't think that Cross, who's pulled off this coup all by himself and is extremely egg-proud about it, would ever have been onto Dinwater, at least, not so soon, if it hadn't been for the story. Once he'd got the story, however, off he went. He knew Dinwater had a gun and he's got the gun. It's not a B. S. A. pattern, which most of the Rook Rifle Club enthusiasts seem to have, but an older one of the same bore but in very good condition. Dinwater is apparently known, among the lower sporting fraternity about here, as a very crack shot. Dinwater's own room—what Cross persists in calling his 'sanctum'—is, as you found last night when you began to think about it, the only point from which Grenville could have been shot in the way he was shot if he was shot when he was standing at the *foot* of the steps. Further, if Grenville was not shot when he was standing at the foot of the steps he was shot when he was standing at the *top*

of the steps, then, as you also found for yourself, the only place he could have been shot from is one of the lower boughs of the old oak behind The Moon.

"Grenville, Cross holds, was shot sometime between 8:50 and 9:45, which is the time when the annoying Welby found him and carried him across to The Moon. He says he can prove this because he's got two reliable witnesses who came through the right-of-way across the park and over the steps at 8:50. When they so came there were no dead baronets about.

"Point Two against Mr. Dinwater. He's got a gun, he's a good shot, he's got access to the window or the tree.

"Now for Point Three. I must say the man Cross, though apparently with only ordinary rule-of-thumb brain, has a great deal of persistence. In this short time he's got together statements from witnesses who were in The Moon that night between a quarter to nine and a quarter to ten. Out of the whole lot he's got four who'll swear that Dinwater was either upstairs for at least half an hour of that time or out of the house altogether for at least half that time. And he has another who'll swear—and Cross says he's going to verify this from the unfortunate fellow's own family—that at 9:20, approximately, Dinwater came downstairs from this dreadful 'sanctum' and was heard asking his wife where his 'oil bottle and four-by-two' had got to. By dazzling reasoning, Cross maintains that the oil bottle and four-by-two must have been to clean the rifle, which by the way does show definitely that it had been recently attended to. . . . Now, that's all very pretty, but not quite pretty enough."

"One horrible flaw," I said.

He grinned at me. "Exactly. Noise of the shot. But hear more of Cross's efforts. Even he saw this, and having got a very large bee already in his bonnet he started to probe

about. He and three men, having spent, on a warrant, about two hours poking about inside the public and private sections of The Moon, had almost given it up as a bad job. In fact, they left the place. And then one of them —Cross doesn't say which: I think he's jealous—conceived the savoury idea of poking about just once more round the stable yard and particularly the oversized muck heap which Dinwater's got there. And in the muck heap this gentleman found a curious piece of work which at first he thought was just iron tubing. Cross fell on it with a howl. It turned out to be an Ellery silencer. When they had rubbed the muck off it, it turned out to be in good condition, not rusty, properly oiled, and recently used. That 'recently used' was Cross's own. Personally, I should say it was difficult to say whether the silencer had been used or not. Dinwater, asked about this, naturally enough denied all knowledge of it. I wish I'd been there when they were telling him about it. There are denials and denials. . . . And then there's Point Four; perhaps the most damaging one of the lot for Dinwater. A girl at the Hall—Lady Grenville's maid—overheard a conversation between Lady Grenville and Grenville just before he went out of the house for the last time on Friday night. In this conversation he mentioned Dinwater, and not only mentioned Dinwater but made it clear that the reason for his going out at this time and for his probably being late for dinner was Dinwater."

He broke off here. He got up and wandered about the room, eventually stopping opposite my window and drumming on it with his fingers just the way he had in Cross's room when I was being put through the hoop. He didn't seem to be going on so I asked:

"That the lot? Not that it isn't enough. Not at all nice for Dinwater I should say."

He turned. "On the face of it, no. But what I feel at the moment is that it is too damning. It's a complete case, you know; far too complete to get in such a short time."

He came to his chair and sat down. He looked across at me. He said:

"Look here, Lawless. What do you feel? When I say feel I mean *feel*. I don't mean what do you think."

I shrugged. I couldn't answer that one. He went on waiting so I said at last:

"Can't help. I don't feel anything. . . . Trouble is, Gethryn, I've too many worries of my own. . . . Good Lord!"

"Quite. Mr. Dinwater apparently lets you out."

"Why apparently?"

It was his turn to shrug. "No idea really, but I said something about you to Cross this morning and all I got was a fairly civil grunt. Very noncommittal. . . . But let's leave that. Can't you separate feeling from thought? Have another try. Imagine yourself never having heard anything about any of this business and my saying to you: 'They say Dinwater shot Grenville. Is that likely?'"

I tried hard and said at last:

"It's difficult. I don't seem to be able to separate my mind like that. I *think* I should have said: 'I don't believe it.'"

Gethryn was restless that morning. He was out of his chair again and once more walking about the room. "I don't," he said. "It's too easy." He had his back to me when he said this, but on the last word he turned round and began to look at me the same way as he had the morning in the police station. He said:

"Look here, Lawless, are you coming in on this? I mean, are you going to help?"

I grinned. I said: "What you are asking me to do, you know, is to help you prove—although at the moment I

don't see how you propose to set about it—what you are asking me to do is to help to get Dinwater out of 'jug' and thereby give that inspector another chance to shove me in. I mean, if you did show him that Dinwater was the wrong man, he'd be so savage at losing a prisoner that I should think the first thing he'd do would be to come and tell me that anything I might say would be taken down and used as evidence against me."

Gethryn shook his head. "You're wrong. You didn't kill Grenville and we're assuming at the moment that Dinwater didn't either. But they've got Dinwater and they've therefore started off on a mistake, and in this sort of business, believe me, it doesn't even take two mistakes to breed a litter of 'em. If they're wrong about Dinwater, they're wrong about everything, and while they're wrong about everything nobody even remotely connected with the job—let alone potential murderers like yourself—is at all safe."

I changed the subject. I asked a question which, for some time, had been worrying me. I said:

"Look here, what are you doing all this for?"

He smiled. "Haven't the faintest idea. I think it's a sort of disease with me. Every time I get mixed up in one of these businesses I always say it's the last and it never is. If I had a nice Watson, he would probably say it was a passion for the truth or an innate desire for justice. Some of my friends would probably say it was just natural nosiness. I should think the real answer is somewhere between the two. . . . Does it matter?"

I had made up my mind. "Not a bit," I said. "The only thing I can't see is how I can possibly help you."

"Give me an hour now?"

I looked at the clock. "One and a half if you like."

He looked at my breeches and boots. "Woodland ramble," he said. "Like to change?"

## CHAPTER SIX

We stood on the path just inside my front gate.

"Just where are we going?" I said. "I might know a quicker way."

"A cross," Gethryn said, "marks the spot where the body fell. Unless there's some way over the park wall, I suppose we'd better go down through the village."

Down through the village we went. It was a quarter of an hour past midday. There was, therefore, Sunday though it was, no one about. In the Farningham district the public houses all open at twelve on the Sabbath. As we passed The Moon, I saw that it was shut. Blinds were drawn over all its windows and the lace curtain which always indicated "closed" was drawn across the glass panel of the door. Gethryn had not apparently looked that way but it began to strike me that very little missed that man. He said, just as we turned right to go over the foot bridge to go through a gap in the wall:

"Certain lack of courage about Mrs. Dinwater!"

I went over the steps first. Almost immediately at the foot, a little to the left, was a small roped-off rectangle, a stake at each corner and two tiers of cord. I looked up. Gethryn was standing at the top of the steps looking back across the stream to the village. He jumped down, landing lightly beside me.

"Just about time," he said.

He went down on his hands and knees with the word, wriggling under the bottom rope. I said: "Time for what?"

"Look-see. The guardian Robert'll be back in a minute. Come on, man."

I came on. I didn't know what we were doing but I wriggled through and knelt by the side of him. He was peering about with his face almost touching the short shrivelled-up grass and every now and then he brushed the tips of his fingers over a spot. I said: "I'd be so much more useful if I knew what we were doing."

"Good God!" His tone was impatient. "Silver sand."

I began to look too. We worked without any success for about ten minutes. The sun was straight above us. It was very hot. The sweat began to drop off my nose onto the grass. Up to now he had taken one half of the rectangle—the size of the plot must have been about eight feet by four—and I'd taken the other. When we met in the middle I thought we'd finished. But no. He grunted: "Change over," and we crawled past each other and began all over again, each going over the other's work. After about three minutes of this checking, I heard the crunching of heavy boots on the gravel path which led from the steps on the other side of the wall to the foot bridge over the mill stream. I remembered the policeman. I turned to give the warning to Gethryn only to find that he was already outside the rectangle. I scrambled after him. He lounged against the wall and began to fill a pipe. I found a cigarette and lit it. The torso of old Morley showed in the gap. He climbed the steps with a great deal of puffing. I sympathized with him. It must have been hot in uniform. He looked at us, at first with suspicion and then, as he made sure that one of us was indeed I, with merely his idea of professional sternness.

". . . and so she died," said Gethryn, "and he went straight out to India. I've never heard anything of him since and I'm sure I don't want to."

"Drank himself to death probably," I said.

Old Morley was now down the steps and once more at the post he should never have left. His ears are very large and very red. I could almost see him straining to hear what we were talking about. I wished him joy of it. It was quite easy to hear. Gethryn said:

"Hardly that, hardly that. Old Godolphin had none of the lesser vices."

I nodded. "P'raps you're right."

He looked at a wrist watch with some ostentation. "Better be getting along," he said.

I agreed, threw a "'Morning, Sergeant" to Morley, and fell into step with Gethryn. He walked, with a lazy swinging stride which I found after a few yards was a good deal faster than it seemed, along the right-of-way; that is, walking to our right and therefore inside the wall but, in direction, going back over our tracks. I must say he is thorough. He went on talking drivel about our recently created friend Godolphin until we were both out of sight and a good hundred yards away from Morley and his "spot where the body fell."

Suddenly Gethryn stopped both walking and talking. He sat down on the huge elm which was blown down in the last gale and never will, I suppose, be moved. I looked down at him. He was much engaged with a penknife and the bowl of his pipe. I was very hot and very sticky, and, now that the first interest of his presence and the activity of that ridiculous job had gone, once more having to fight against the cold, black misery—I cannot find any other word for my state of mind than miserable—which Sheila's reception of my message had bred in me. I said, and I suppose it sounded a bit savage:

"That all you brought me out for? Nice game of circuses and consequences with Morley."

He didn't look at me. He went on scraping out his pipe. But he said:

"Sit down and cool off."

For a moment I thought I was going to walk off. But then, realizing what being alone was going to mean, I sat down beside him. He said: "Well *that's* all right. . . . Here's where you come in——"

I interrupted. This was a bit too much. I said:

"What's all right? And how the devil can I come in when I don't know what I'm coming into? There seems about as much sense in all this as a game of Praps."

He shut up his penknife and slipped it back in his pocket. He half turned to look at me.

"What's worrying you?" he said. "We were looking for silver sand and we found no silver sand. . . . Look here, perhaps I'd better explain this a bit more. I thought you'd got it but I see you haven't. I told you that on the back of Grenville's coat, between the shoulder blades and under the edge of the collar, I found some grains of silver sand. Why silver sand? The stuff doesn't grow about here. The stuff isn't used in the house of Grenville. There was none, as I hope after your antics you would be prepared to help me swear, on the grass where Grenville was found dead. That there should be silver sand on Grenville's coat is then so improbable as to be almost impossible. But it was there. So one's got to look for that great improbability. Make a hypothesis of that and you oughtn't to find the answer difficult." I felt his eyes on me. He changed his tone and added: "Stop thinking about trouble and switch your mind onto that. Do you good, Lawless." Rather an uncanny chap!

I tried to follow his advice. I put myself a question. How should there be silver sand on the coat of a man recently shot when there's, neither by proximity nor likelihood, no

chance of that silver sand having got there by any ordinary means? I thought for a long time. So long, I think, that Gethryn got impatient. He said at last:

"You know, you aren't putting the right question to yourself. What you're doing is to let all your thinking get tainted by a lie that looks like the truth. I mean, you're assuming that because Grenville's body was found where it was, he was killed there. Suppose he wasn't. Think what that means and you'll get the answer."

I did. Not at once. When it came, I said:

"Good God! If he wasn't killed there, it means that he was brought there after he was killed, which implies an elaborate plant. . . . Look here, Gethryn, don't laugh, but is this what you're trying to say—that Grenville was, at spot A, slugged with a sand-bag? That he was then shot at somebody's convenience at point B and later taken to point C which is the foot of those steps along there? It sounds like a bad dream, rather."

"All murders," Gethryn said, "are bad dreams. Of somebody's. You're quite right. Except, possibly, in separating the place he was sand-bagged from the place he was shot. They needn't necessarily have been different, you know."

This was doing me good. This was *making* me think and therefore helping me not to. I said suddenly:

"But look here, do they fill sand-bags with silver sand?"

"Not," said Gethryn, "necessarily. But there was silver sand on his coat, ergo our sand-bag was filled with silver sand."

I grinned at that. "And it was you," I said, "who yesterday told me that you couldn't follow my logic. If what you've just said is logic, let's give the world over to women right away."

He shook his head. "Never said it was logic. Logic is a

useful tool. So's a chisel, but you don't use a chisel to take out a screw with. At least, if you do, you spoil the screw and the tool. In this sort of business, you want to get your stuff, however mad, however absurd, however unlikely it is—get it all, even putting it on a plate with a pie frill round it—and look at it. When you've got it on the plate, that's the time for logic. String it together by logic and it all comes out nice and tidy."

Suddenly he got to his feet. He stood there with his hands in his pockets. He said:

"Come on now! I told you this is where you came in. Come in."

"Where?"

"Put yourself in the place of the killer. Give yourself a run of these woods for a radius of, say, a mile. You can narrow that if you like because the body's got to be moved. Now think me the best places for doing your sand-bagging stuff. Don't worry about the shooting just yet."

I didn't answer. I put my elbows on my knees and my head in my hands. I know the park coverts fairly well. I tried to draw a map of them in my mind. I've no idea how long I sat like that; all I do know is that when I lifted my head and started to blink at the sun, Gethryn wasn't with me any longer. I sat up and looked about. For a moment I thought he had gone altogether, but I found him at last, not more than a couple of yards from me. He was lying on his belly behind the tree upon which I was sitting, writing in a thin notebook.

He got up. He looked at me with one eyebrow lifted.

"How many?" he said. He shut the notebook and put it in his pocket.

I told him: "Three." I looked at his clothes with some amusement. I said:

"They won't be so nice when we've finished."

"All three?" he said.

"No, the first one. The other two are more accessible."

He looked at me with that half smile which only yesterday I had ridiculously thought offensive. He said:

"And therefore more likely. You've been thinking, Lawless. Don't stop. Keep yourself in that killer's place. There you are with a dead weight of baronet on your hands that you've got to transport. The quickest way for us to work is to choose the most accessible of your three possibilities and do that one first."

We did. I led him up and joined the right-of-way again as far almost as the big beech which overhangs the wall outside my house. Here I turned sharp left, up a slope, across the grass at the edge of Crofters Copse and then turned sharp right down into that almost completely hidden hollow called by the yokels—for some reason which even they've forgotten—Tanners Cup.

We drew a blank. It wasn't until Gethryn got up, dusted his knees, stretched himself and called a halt that I realized how long we'd been at it. It was ten minutes past my lunch time. He asked me a question with that one eyebrow he used to raise. I said: "I can go on until two-thirty, then I must work."

We sat down on the grass at the foot of an oak and looked over the clearing we'd tried to comb. Gethryn said:

"If there's any silver sand there, they can keep it and hang Dinwater. Where's this next place of yours? If it's more than a mile, they can hang Dinwater twice."

I shook my head. "Four hundred yards at the outside."

We went. We had to fight our way through undergrowth to achieve my short cut and we got even hotter and quite a lot dirtier, but I suppose we saved a quarter of a mile. This second choice of mine, I must say, I hadn't much faith

in. It was, it seemed to me, a good place for the job but I honestly didn't believe that, save for the keepers—and I couldn't imagine any of them being Grenville's murderer—it was not likely that anyone knew of it except the poaching brotherhood. But I ruled them out as being most unlikely to execute so obviously intricate a business. This place was another hollow, much smaller, rather less overgrown, and much deeper. This time Gethryn took off his coat. I followed suit and again we started to crawl. I don't think we'd been at it for more than three minutes when suddenly I looked up to find him squatting back on his heels and staring at me. He was saying:

"All change! No further to travel on this line."

I jumped up and ran over to him. Between his feet—he was sitting in the middle of the clearest patch there was—I saw crushed into the hard clay soil a little glittering trail.

(2)

Gethryn sat on the edge of my bed while I changed. He had a pipe in one hand and one of my pint pots in the other. I finished tying my tie and said:

"Yes, I see we've got on, but I'm damned if I can see where we've got to. We assume, because of the silver sand, that Grenville was laid out in the dingle, shot either there or elsewhere and then taken to the steps and left, this proving that Dinwater, because we know he was in or about The Moon all that evening, couldn't have had anything to do with it, but what I'd like to know is this: Can you make an unimaginative police force take all this from a few grains of sand and a few persons' opinion that Dinwater is an unlikely murderer?"

He took the pot away from his face and said:

"Not a chance in ten thousand. I wouldn't try."

I looked at him in exasperation. "What're you so pleased about, then?"

He smiled at me rather sadly. "My dear chap! I'm pleased because we've got on. Silver sand has made us believe. We know that Dinwater didn't do it and that, therefore, somebody else did. Ergo we start looking for the somebody else. When we've found him, we see to it that he's put in Dinwater's place. Everything tidy. Everything nice."

"In the meantime," I began—"in the meantime Mr. Dinwater, Mrs. Dinwater, and any little Dinwaters there may be find life not too pleasant."

"I can't help that. They'd find it a damn sight more unpleasant if he was strung up, wouldn't they?"

I began to change money and cag from the pockets of my old flannels to the suit I was wearing. I said as I worked:

"Tell me something. How do you stand with the police on this job? It's been worrying me. None of my business, of course, but I must say I'd like to know exactly what your relations are."

He laughed at that. "So'd I. If I knew, I'd tell you. I can't quite make out whether I'm an interloping busybody or the Père Tabaret of Farningham. Tell you the truth, I don't much care. If hanging innocent men and murderers and all that sort of thing weren't rather serious matters, I'd rather hope I was the first. I'm what you might call a spoiled detective. When I started this sort of thing, it was with the avuncular good will of the really big noises at Scotland Yard and somehow, all my other jobs, with the exception of the Brono one, have been the same. This is something quite new for me. I was really pitch-forked into it because I was staying with old Bleydon and he, I suppose, wanted to show off to the police of his county and I wanted to get away from him. But to-morrow Car-

stairs, the chief constable, comes back. Then we'll know where we are."

It was past two-thirty already. I had to bawl out to Yule to get the Morris out of the garage. If I was to be at Crawford's within half an hour of my time, I had to hurry.

Gethryn and I started in our several cars at the same time. I heard a roar of exhaust, saw a cloud of dust, and he was gone by the time I was a hundred yards up the hill.

(3)

It is neither of interest to any reader or myself to tell you of my afternoon. It was a bad afternoon. Thank God, there was some work attached to it. Not just ordinary keep-it-in-and-keep-it-quiet-and-I'll-send-something-round-for-you sort of work, but work which made me think. Twice I went home and twice, as soon as I got there, I found urgent messages waiting which made me set off again at once. In that weather, at any ordinary time, I should have cursed. I cursed that day, but really I was thanking Providence that something was looking after me. It may sound silly, but I really believe it's no under-statement if I say that had that afternoon been an idle afternoon, I don't know what would have happened to me. By the time I got home at a quarter-past eight, having driven nearly twenty miles back from one of the most difficult and unexpected horse operations I've ever been asked to do—I hope I don't get any more like it—I was tired out. I forced some food down me and went to bed and to sleep. It was not pleasant sleep, but I suppose even the dreams I had—and they were damn funny, nightmarish jumbles—were preferable to what my waking thoughts would have been.

The last one of these dreams I've never forgotten. I

seemed to be in a huge white-washed room—a room I should say about seven acres in size—about which were stuck, like cardboard figures in a child's game, scrubbed deal tables and chairs. On every chair there was a policeman. By every table was lying a roped and shrieking horse. The policemen kept shouting things and pointing to the horses. I could see their lips moving and I knew what they were shouting but somehow I couldn't hear anything. Not a sound. I kept waving to them impatiently. I knew I would attend to all the horses when I'd found what I was looking for. I was crawling round on my hands and knees in ever narrowing circles, groping round a filthy floor and grubbing about in the dust, sifting it with my fingers, looking for minute, sparkling specks. I found none. I remember getting up and looking round at that comic, beastly frieze of impossibilities and saying: "It's no good. It's no good." And then I glanced down at my fingers and saw that what I'd taken to be mud and dust was dust and caked blood. . . .

(4)

I waked in the morning with a head like a painful football and a taste like wet wood ash in my mouth. From my bed I can see two apple trees, a lot of sky, and the hump of Farningham down. For morning after morning lately, stretching back for week upon week, I had seen that deep narrow vista—it had always seemed to me like the beautiful, somehow unreal work of a skilled scene painter—lighted with blue lights and gold. Soft blue for the sky and the hazy, shimmering yellow for the beginning of another of those scorching days. But this morning it was steel gray.

The weather for the moment had broken. Thin vicious pencils of rain were driving slantwise across the world.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

In the first draft I made of this book, when I got to this point I carried on as I had been carrying on. That is to say, telling the story as it impinged upon me and my doings. But when I read the thing over I saw that it was here where I began to get very dull. There was, in fact, a lot too much "me" and not nearly enough story. That worried me a lot. I suppose a man's actions and emotions described by himself can be interesting, but I'm certain that they can only be interesting up to a point.

I despaired for a bit, actually thought of chucking the whole thing up altogether until suddenly I saw that if I just put in here a certain letter of Gethryn's which he once let me read I should not only relieve, for a while at least, any reader of myself and my worries but should also get on with the story, and get on with it much better than I could by mere "straight writing."

Gethryn was very decent. I don't think he ever really liked the idea of letting me print his stuff, but he let me have my way in the end.

Here goes then: The letter which you are just going to read was sent by Gethryn to a friend of his who is an assistant commissioner at Scotland Yard. It was written on the afternoon following the day of our hunt for silver sand. I've given it a section all to itself.

(2)

Dear E. L.:

This to your private address and not to the Yard, so that you needn't feel too official about it all. It is a gnashing of teeth.

Who is it who advises His Majesty to fill responsible and intelligence-requiring jobs with fat-heads so fluid? From the chaste design at the top of this letter you will see where I am staying. Your agile mind will immediately associate this letter—and for once you'll be quite right—with the Grenville murder.

This isn't a house where a man can do anything much except drink and go to sleep. Consequently when Bleydon himself—he knows the Grenvilles and took me to lunch there on the day Grenville was killed—implored me to butt in I must say that I rather jumped at it. So, at first, did the police. Later, the inspector in charge of the case not unreasonably imagined that he had got on his own much quicker than I had. *That* didn't matter much. He's got quite the wrong man in stir, but that's so common an occurrence in this country that nobody can complain. I could have handled *him*, but I can't handle the latest development of the situation in the unpleasant shape of Lt. Col. retd. (or should it be L/Cpl. acting unpaid?) William Fothergill Carstairs.

As a constable he would be laughable. As a chief constable he is matter for tears.

You think that I am peeved. You go to the head of the class. Corporal Carstairs, the man himself would have you know, is right on top of his job. Dammit, he's got good men under him, better men round him, and he's the best of the lot. What Corporal Carstairs and his band don't know about police work isn't worth knowing. If Corporal Carstairs and his band say that John Smith is guilty, guilty, by God, John Smith has got to be, whether he was or not! Corporal Carstairs doesn't think much of any new-fangled nonsense like seeking for adequate motive or taking into consideration the possibility that things may not be all that they seem. What Corporal Carstairs really likes is circumstantial evidence and plenty of it.

He arrived back from some place or other which must have been extremely lucky when he left it, this morning. Because he had not read the newspapers he didn't know, until he got to his throne room, that anybody in his province had been killing anybody else. Nevertheless, after ten minutes' talk with his

subordinates he found that there could be no possible doubt whatsoever that the unfortunate being who had been arrested was guilty. It was, by God, a plain straightforward case, as plain as the nose on someone's face! Mr. Dinwater apparently wouldn't have minded shooting Sir Charles; Mr. Dinwater *could* have shot Sir Charles; Mr. Dinwater *did* shoot Sir Charles.

I am sorry to inflict all this on you, but it has already done me quite a lot of good. As a matter of fact Dinwater didn't kill Grenville. There is against him a very tidy heap of circumstantial evidence; far too tidy. So tidy that from the moment I first heard of it I was sure that it was so likely that it was almost certainly untrue.

I have neither the time nor the heart to inflict upon you just yet the whole process by which I found that Dinwater wasn't guilty. As a matter of fact you would say that it wasn't proof at all, which is just what Corporal Carstairs hardly bothered to say. But where you differ is that he really believes that it isn't proof, and you wouldn't. You'd want me to go on. All Corporal Carstairs wants is to get Inquest, Police Court, and Assizes over as soon as possible in order that Dinwater can be hanged and the police all go back to breakfast. What *I* want is to make sure that if there is a hanging at all it is awarded to the person who really earned it.

I can see you scratching your head over this. You don't know what I'm after. I'm afraid I can't help you, as I don't myself. What I'm doing is to put on record at this date what I know. I know that you and your real policeman can't butt into a county job—not, at least, without a lot of trouble—so I don't expect anything from you; not, at least, at this stage, but I have an idea that people like you and the Commissioner keep rather closer tabs on the work of other police forces than they imagine. So you may be glad of this. As I say, it is serving me two purposes. I am getting down what I think at this stage and I am also blowing off steam.

I am, however, going to ask you to do one thing for me. If you

can, get somebody to let me have anything your people may know about Grenville deceased. I could bear quite a lot of it. Thank you.

This is a queerish business. As Dinwater didn't do it, he can't have done it. That looks like Alice, but it's good sense, if you know what I know. And what it leads up to is this: that the appearance of Dinwater's guilt *can't* have been coincidental: that is, that the job's been planted on him. Who's the gardener? We've got a very odd bag down here. There's a young widow, charming, great deal of character, conscientious as a wife, but who I should say was unhappy as a wife. There's a very pleasant and a good deal deeper than he seems, young vet. who was once a doctor. There's an unpleasant old family physician; a hitherto invisible Canadian; a bulky American; a very county, very Harris-tweedy woman named Willington, who looks like an Airedale and breeds cockers (whereabouts of male Willington unknown); there's a young and smug under-keeper who helped (innocently or not) on the Dinwater ramp; and a bailiff called Burford who apparently believes that bailiffs should be seen and not heard and if possible not seen. There is, too, an anthropoid farm labourer named Welby who found the body and, being unable to read detective stories, didn't know he should leave it where it was, and therefore removed it from where it was and shot it into a public house.

So far, nobody has impugned the veracity of Mr. Welby. I suppose they think that he hasn't enough brain to fib. They're possibly right. Certainly the body had lain where he said he found it.

That's the bag as I know it so far. It seems to me to include the whole population of Samsford, but having looked up this village in the gazetteer I find its population is registered as 1500. I suppose all the others live underground.

I'd better stop or I shall have you sending down doctors to certify me, but I would like you to get that information about Grenville for me. I don't know what Corporal Carstairs is doing, but I should say that he's not worrying any more about motive.

The start of the case against Dinwater is that he was heard a month before the killing having a most unrespectful breeze with Grenville. The police must of course be following this up to see whether they can trace the source of the quarrel, but I'm afraid they won't get deep enough. Dinwater had been with Grenville first as batman during the war, then as body-servant in London, then in some capacity, not yet stated, during the time (Lady Grenville tells me this was, so far as she knows, six years) when Grenville was living in the States. There were traces of America still sticking to Grenville. There are traces of America still sticking to Dinwater. The under-keeper who overheard the row said there were a lot of words he couldn't hear and a lot of words which though he didn't think they were in a foreign tongue he couldn't understand. In spite of his smugness I guarantee that these were not naughty words. What they were, what they must have been, were parts of the great American language. Now, it's very odd for a man in Dinwater's position to blackguard a man in Grenville's position. It seems probable that this blackguarding, which the witness states was apparently over some promise which Grenville had made years before to Dinwater and had not carried out, was to do with the life in America. That's not logic, it's an elliptic guess, but a pretty safe one. If there were, as it seems there must have been, times in Grenville's life when Dinwater was on closer terms than those between a baronet brewer and an ex-batman whom he had put in charge of a public house, these times were more likely to have been during any life in America than any life in the British Army or Mayfair.

What did Grenville deceased do in America? Did he come back with more money than he went there with? Has he still any American interests? Lady Grenville either cannot or will not tell me the answers to these questions. How much did Grenville leave and to whom? (That last is perhaps an awkward one for you. I may get the answer before you do.) Lastly, has Grenville retained, since he came back from the States, any interests in any affairs of any kind in the States?

Good-bye, and God bless you.

A. R. G.

(3)

As I said, that letter was written on the Monday afternoon. What I did during that morning and afternoon wouldn't be of much interest except as a lesson in Don'ts to young Vets; as a matter of fact, except that the weather turned fine again, I can't remember anything very plainly. In the evening, however, something happened. I had been over at old Lestrade's place, which is about as far as I ever go, and I drove back through Farningham. It's longer that way but pleasanter. I went through the town slowly. Monday's cattle market day and although it was just after six when I entered the town, the narrow streets were still crammed.

I meant to drive right through but a hold-up caused by three unruly, traffic-shy heifers brought me to a standstill exactly opposite The Compasses. There were a lot of other cars parked there. I left mine as it was and pushed my way in. All the bars and even that pleasant room which they will spoil by calling the Lounge were overflowing. I and a couple of farmers who were only just before me had to stand in the passage. It took us I should think five minutes before we got the drinks. When mine came it tasted very good. I could have poured the whole lot straight down but began instead to dally with it. Unlucky, that, for it meant that I was never going to finish it. As I raised the glass for the second time, there was suddenly, from just outside, a very devil of a hullabaloo. The two farmers and I looked at one another. One of them said:

"Scrap, seemingly!" and was out of the door in a flash.

Any diversion is better than none, and once or twice before on market days in Farningham I had seen good fights. The second farmer and I started together, got stuck in the door, and at last squeezed out onto the sidewalk.

There was a fight or the beginning of one. I had one look; then gasped; then, in spite of my wretchedness, began to laugh.

The front of The Compasses is set back a good fifteen feet from the sidewalk proper. It has its own little front courtyard, open to the street but really cut off from it by white two-foot posts joined with chains. Pressing all around this now, but too eager for what seemed to be coming to encroach on this natural arena, was the usual market-day crowd. Just inside the chained square were Aviss and Belton. Both, by some strange coincidence, were dressed exactly alike in white flannel trousers, brown shoes, and blue jackets, but here the resemblance ended. I don't think I have ever seen two men so absolutely dissimilar. In the ordinary way dissimilarity is not necessarily funny. This time it somehow was. By this I mean that while Aviss alone wouldn't have been a joke and Belton alone wouldn't have been a joke, facing each other as they were there was something indescribably humorous about them; rather as if it weren't a real fight at all, but something staged for the benefit of the crowd. To make things funnier still, Belton had in his right hand part of what just now had been a tie. The remains of this rag were dangling from Aviss's shirt collar. Across Belton's right cheek was a red angry patch. As I began to laugh I heard a voice from the crowd:

"You slap 'im agen, Mary!"

Whether it was this implied slur on his previous methods that stung Aviss into sudden movement or just the natural beginning, I can't say. Anyhow, he put his great head down between his enormous shoulders, grunted like a bull, and charged in.

I hadn't had much to do with Belton, but somehow never liked him much. Now I almost began to. He was very slim,

very cool, and very elegant, but he also knew how to use his feet and his hands. His sidestep from that rush was as clean and as neat as you like, and the short, wicked left hook which got poor old Aviss in the short ribs as good as many you may see at the National Sporting Club. Aviss, with nothing to check his rush, plunged on. He barged into one of the little posts, clutched at it, swung round with his own momentum, and sat down heavily. He began to cough. His tormentor in the crowd spoke again:

"Don't you 'ave it, my good woman! Fetch a copper stick to 'im!"

I must say Aviss was quick; for all his bulk he was on his feet in a flash. Once more he put his head down, grunted, and waded in. This time Belton, who obviously intended to keep on with these tactics as long as Aviss would let him, muffed his sidestep. At least, he slipped on the cobbles and had to waste so much time regaining his balance that before he could move he was held fast by Aviss's enormous arms. The smile came off his face pretty quick and I don't wonder. Aviss might be fat but I should have hated to let him get hold of me. He just settled down comfortably, worked his chin into Belton's shoulder, and began to squeeze.

The crowd began to take sides now. The majority were for Belton, and there was much and outspoken advice as to what he should do with his knees, but there were a few, including his tormentor of a few minutes before, who were for Aviss. They persisted in calling him "Mary" but they were backing him all the same. I had had my laugh out by this time and I must say I began not to like this. If it had been just a sudden flare-up between two men who merely ordinarily disliked one another, I shouldn't have worried. But Belton and Aviss! And I didn't like the look on Aviss's face at all. I was just going to jump over the posts and see what I

could do, even at the risk of spoiling the fun for the crowd and perhaps getting restrained myself, when the Law appeared. The Law was in a pair, and with the rustic equivalent of "Now, then! Wot's all this?" and a little strong-arm stuff of their own, got the two apart. Belton stood quiet and his smile had come back, but he was breathing pretty heavily. I think his ribs must have been sore. I still liked him better than I did before. He was taking things very coolly. Aviss, too, was doing his best to restrain himself, but it wasn't a very good best. He apparently regarded himself as the attacked. He said so in no uncertain voice. His strident nasal bark could have been heard hundreds of yards away. He began again to tell to the world at large the story of Belton's last outrage.

I edged away, backing through the crowd until I was out of sight. I didn't want to be hauled in as a friend and asked to come along to the station. I'd had enough of that station. I thought Inspector Cross could very well do without a gratuitous sight of me. I thought I was clear of the crowd and took a larger step back. I came down on somebody's foot. A voice said:

"Sorry! I washed them last night and can't do anything with 'em this morning. . . . What's your friend Mr. Aviss been playing at?"

It was Gethryn. He cut short my apologies. We went back together into the inn which was clear now, all the customers outside. I didn't find my original drink but had another equally as good. We managed to get away just before the tide came in again. We went out by the back door and came round to the front again when the street was clear. A hundred yards away, and proceeding in an orderly manner toward the police station were the two constables and the rioters. Aviss's back looked like a well-tailored elephant's. Belton's, in spite of the dust that some-

how had got upon it, rather too much like an illustration in *The Tailor and Cutter*. We stood and looked after them.

"That other now?" said Gethryn. "Belton?"

I nodded. He still looked after them as he went on talking. He said:

"Know him at all?"

"Hardly at all."

"Good sort?"

I shrugged. "Couldn't say. Never thought much of him until now. He seems to be able to use his hands a bit. Poor old Aviss, though, that fellow does get his shirt out."

Gethryn turned. "Got your car here," he said, "or shall I give you a lift?"

I pointed to the Morris. "I'd rather go in that if you don't mind. Once of your driving's enough."

He grinned. Then, on the instant, grew solemn again. He walked across the road and I saw that now the black Voisin-Maxwell was behind me. It was almost white with dust. I looked at it.

"Travel a bit?" I said.

Gethryn said: "To town and back. . . . D'you know, I think I could support an interview with Mr. Aviss. Will you fix it up?"

I thought a moment. "If he's at home to-night, yes." I had a sudden thought, entirely selfish I think. I pictured my own state of mind if I were to spend that evening alone. I said:

"Tell you what—come back and have some food with me. Won't be much but it'll be quite good. After dinner we'll find Aviss. If The Moon's still shut I expect he'll be at home."

For a moment I thought he hadn't heard. Once more he seemed to be looking up the street. Aviss and Belton and their escort had disappeared and the place was empty. I

could feel disappointment coming over me in a great wave; I could see a lonely evening running into a lonelier night. He turned his head and smiled at me. He said:

"Love to. See you at the house."

Once more before the Morris had moved more than twenty yards, the Voisin went by with a muffled roar.

(4)

It was half-past nine that evening when we pushed open the gate of Aviss's drive. Gethryn looked about him.

"Pleasant little house," he said. "Who's the owner?"

I told him Lady Sibart. "But she's let it to Aviss every summer for the last three or four years. He must be a good tenant. Expect he pays through the nose like all Americans."

"Rich man?"

I didn't answer. I thought I'd better not because though we were only halfway up the drive we had just come into sight of the French windows of the drawing room and I saw Aviss himself coming out through them to meet us. His hospitality is at times a bit overwhelming. He almost ran up to us. He insisted upon a festival of handshaking. He led us in by the way he himself had come out, lambs to the slaughter. I don't think I've ever seen so extensive and varied an array of drinks as he had set out upon what must have been a specially made table. Almost before we were inside the room he was asking us what we would have and rolling off an incredible list. From curiosity—I had never tasted one before—I let him make me a mint julep. Gethryn took whisky and soda.

The julep took a long time to make but I must say that it was worth it. Gethryn lay back in a vast chair. His long body was relaxed and his eyes were half closed; yet, some-

how, no one would have thought him even a quarter asleep. I nursed my frosted glass on a little sofa by the open window. Aviss stood before the fern-filled grate and beamed upon us like a mundane bishop. He said:

"Say, just can't tell you how very, very pleased I was to get your ring! Since they've closed down The Moon I naturally haven't a thing to do. I come, gentlemen, to England every year and I come to drink. But there's only one thing I hate more than not drinking at all, and that's drinking alone."

He broke off and lit one of the enormous black cigars with which Gethryn's but not my face was already decorated. I stuck to my pipe. I had a feeling that our host in some obscure way was trying to get us to say what we really had come for without asking, but that, also, he was so impatient to know that he could hardly bear it. I think I was right. The very next thing he said was, looking at Gethryn who hadn't yet spoken:

"I'm a very direct sort of a guy, Colonel, and it seems to me that your presence here to-night is not due entirely to social reasons. I'd lay three bottles of Haig to a nickel that there's something you want to ask me."

Gethryn pulled himself up in his chair. His eyes were wide open now. He said:

"You're right, sir! It's no good not admitting it." He became very frank; so frank that, though I couldn't think why, I was a little astonished. He said:

"Mr. Aviss. When I met you with Lawless here in The Compasses the other day I implied that I hadn't got any interest whatsoever in this Grenville business. That was purely automatic discretion. I have got an interest. The police and I don't agree over this thing, so I'm purely private, you understand. But it's my opinion that in Dinwater they've got the wrong man; that, in other

words, the whole case against Dinwater is a fake. What I think you'd probably call a plant."

Aviss's eyes now were very shrewd behind the big glasses. Every line of his big body showed tense interest. He began to speak.

"Queer, Colonel, your coming to-night. I——" He cut himself short. "But that'll keep," he said. "You finish shooting."

Gethryn took another swallow from his glass and leaned over and set it carefully down. There was only a little pause but it seemed curiously heavy.

"You're an American, Mr. Aviss," he said.

Aviss twinkled. "It doesn't need a sleuth to tell that. Sorry, go right on, Colonel."

Gethryn smiled. "You're an American, and it is as an American that I want you to help me. You didn't know Grenville, did you?"

Aviss shook his head. "Nope. Up at the Hall, with all due respect, they're misguided enough to prefer Canadians!" The extraordinary venom put into that last word made me swallow a smile. I reflected that it was lucky for him that he didn't know we had seen his argument with Belton. He'd have been uncomfortable. As it was, he was at ease.

"Quite," Gethryn nodded. "But though you didn't know Grenville, you may have known that between the end of 1919 and the end of 1926 Grenville lived wholly in the States."

Aviss nodded solemnly. "Yep. That poor yap they've jailed—Dinwater—he was with him out there."

"Exactly. Now, Mr. Aviss, you've been a patron of The Moon. I should say you've had a chat or two with Dinwater."

"Yep," said Aviss, "and chat or two's an under-state-

ment, Colonel. As I say, when I drink I like to drink in company and sometimes in this one-horse-power retreat Ahlfred Dinwater has been the only human being I could drink with. And he sells good beer. . . . Yep. Dinwater and I have had a chat or two."

"When you were talking to Dinwater," Gethryn said, "did the subject of his life in the States ever come up? Must have."

"Sure did!" said Aviss. "But if you're going to ask me, Colonel, what it was that Dinwater and Sir Grenville made Sir Grenville's pile at, you've stopped off at the wrong store."

Gethryn looked at him. "Can't, won't, or mustn't?"

Aviss's eyes twinkled behind the great glasses. "Spill the beans, y'mean? Can't, Colonel, can't. That very problem is one that's cost me many a quiet moment's head-scratching. I've even asked Dinwater that flat out. On two occasions. But he's always sidestepped. . . . All I can tell you, Colonel, is that Dinwater once let slip—he was three quarters stewed at the time—that whatever it was Sir Grenville did in the States, he did it in Illinois, and at that mostly Chicago." He turned suddenly with one of those astonishingly quick movements of his bulk. He looked at me and added: "You know anything, Lawless? . . . No, suppose you don't, or you'd have told your friend the Colonel."

I shook my head. "Not a thing."

Gethryn changed the subject. He looked at Aviss and said, almost idly:

"You used an expression just now—'made his pile.' Did he?"

Aviss shrugged, a mountainous ripple of his frame.

"Couldn't say. Gossip says that the last Sir Grenville could only just scrape up enough out of the family estates

to keep that fine place in proper trim; they say that when this Sir Grenville came back from the States and settled here on the 13th of February, 1926, he started just throwing dollars about on improvements. Those stables, Dinwater once told me, have been near empty for the last quarter of a century. As soon as this Sir Grenville got married six months after he took over the place, the stables were full. By inference, Colonel, I'd say that this Sir Grenville came back from the States with a bit more'n he went to them with. Smartish guy, I've been told."

Aviss broke off here. I saw that change coming over his face and I made a bet with myself that he was going to come round to the subject of Belton. I won. He did. He said:

"Colonel, I'll say to you that if you wanna know real inside stuff about the late lamented Sir Grenville, you better just shoot a pasteboard on a very charming neighbour of mine by the name of Belton. Guy Belton."

I grinned. Gethryn, rather to my surprise, let out a laugh. It was quite a loud laugh and very hearty. I suppose it was because I'd never heard him laugh before that it didn't sound quite real to me. He said:

"I believe I've heard, Mr. Aviss, that you and Mr. Belton aren't very good friends."

I thought Aviss was off. "Good friends!" he began, and then took hold of himself. He made visible effort; he looked as if he were a sword swallower's deputy who hasn't had very much practice. At last he achieved rather a sickly smile. He said:

"Colonel, you very near had me on my hobbyhorse, but I've dismounted. What I seriously mean, as one man of the world to another, is this: that my feelings towards Belton apart, I think you might do a good deal worse than tap around that quarter if you're thinking—" He paused a moment here. He looked down at Anthony and his eyes

behind the big glasses were very shrewd. "—if you're thinking that you'd like inside information about Sir Grenville's life in my country." I opened my mouth to speak but shut it again. Gethryn was before me. He said:

"Thought Belton was a Canadian?"

Aviss was wonderful. He controlled himself again. He said, very slowly and only a little thickly:

"And so, Colonel, he is. There isn't another tract of land on the globe from the Polar circles to Tierra del Fuego that'd own a skunk like that and not have it put away at birth. But unpleasantly for the citizens of my country there's no law prohibiting undesirable citizens of Canada from coming and making nuisances of themselves all over our fair land. And that, sir, is what Mister Guy Belton Ess-quire did, so he's given me to understand, from the year of grace 1918 until the year of grace 1926. I know nothing, thank God, of what Belton did in my country, nor what unfortunate district was forced to have him reside in it, but what I've said to you, Colonel, I have said because Mr. Guy Belton, this Canadian that Canada wouldn't have—and that's saying a very, very great deal—was intimate with Sir Grenville and Lady Sheila Grenville."

He stopped there. From a vast and perfectly hideous ormolu cabinet he took another of those terrible cigars. He lit it and beamed round on us. I say beamed round on us because now for the second time he included me in his look. He said, in quite a different tone from that he had been using:

"Now, boys, let's get down to real business. You, Lawless, have another mint julep or one of my special Mother's Milk cocktails, or just a very, very big highball. Or perhaps you'd like some beer. I've got some of the same beer that our friend Dinwater keeps at The Moon. I'll tell you as a

friend that that beer up here doesn't taste quite so good as it does down there. But it's passable. Or I have here"—he walked over to the table and picked up bottle after bottle "—some real fine cognac, some old Bourbon whisky, quite a nice thing in Ports, and this pale heliotrope stuff which comes from Serbia and looks like an indecent swear word in German. . . . What'll you have, Colonel? Come on, Lawless!"

Gethryn had another whisky and soda, a small one. I didn't chance another julep. I had, also small, a gin and gingerbeer. We talked a bit of this, that, and the other. Largely, I think, of the other. Anyhow I don't remember much of it. I think Aviss did most of the talking and I remember we laughed a good deal, but that evening I seemed to myself to be somebody quite different. It was as if there were two me's. The outer one, the shell, could smoke and talk and laugh and drink and enjoy them all, but the inner me . . . well, his feelings I'm not saying anything about.

We got away from Aviss just before ten. He walked to the gate with us and stood, a huge black bulk with a white front, looking, in the half darkness, like a nightmare penguin. As we strolled off down the hill—we had walked up, for some reason or other that I can't remember—he waved and shouted some strange farewell and was gone.

(5)

Gethryn had left his car just outside my gate. He halted when we reached it and, I think, was going to climb in and drive off, but I made a despairing effort to keep him.

I knew that this outer shell who was managing to deaden the pain of the real person inside it would probably dissolve the minute I was left alone. I only said:

"Come in and have a last one. Do!" and I think I said it fairly rationally. But, as I've probably said before, he's an uncanny person. I knew somehow that he didn't really want to come in, though his acceptance gave no indication of this; and I knew also that he knew why I had asked him.

We walked together up the path to the porch. While I fumbled for my key we stood on the threshold, not only of the door, but of one of the biggest surprises I think I ever had in my life. Nothing very exciting, merely something so completely unexpected, and especially now, that the amazement I felt then I can still feel when I call the whole incident to mind.

I had just opened the door and was standing aside to let Gethryn go in first when Mrs. Yule appeared; Mrs. Yule, who upon eight nights out of seven was in bed by nine-thirty, visitors or no visitors.

"Sir," she said, "sir, there's a gentleman to see you. I didn't know whether you'd want to see 'um, but he was that pressin'. 'E's in the drawin' room, sir. Sir, he give me a card." She reached out to the table underneath my whip rack and fumbled and at last handed me a little white oblong. I read it; I said, turning to Gethryn:

"Well, I'm damned!"

He looked over my shoulder, and the faintest of faint whistles came from him. The card read:

Mr. Guy Belton,
The White House,
SAMSFORD.

"God's Own Country!" said Gethryn softly. "Well, well!"

We looked at each other. In the background Mrs. Yule still hovered. I sent her off. We went into my minute drawing room. In the big chair by the reading lamp was a

slim and far too exquisite a figure—dinner jacket, white waistcoat, red carnation in buttonhole, platinum chain across white waistcoat, and shoes so long and so pointed that they looked like half-guinea torpedo boats from Hamley's. The door shut with a soft click behind Gethryn. Belton shut the book he had been reading—it was my much prized *Gambado*—laid it gently down and rose to meet us. He came toward me with hand outstretched. It's strange how everyone except Britons seem to want to spend one third of their lives in shaking hands. It's so universal that I often wonder whether there isn't something wrong with us for not liking it. I shook the hand; I couldn't help it. He smiled with a flash of very even, very white teeth. As he smiled the odd little black moustache twitched upward at the corners, giving him rather a feline look. He said:

"Say, I don't know what you'll think of me, Mr. Lawless, but I just couldn't help myself."

I said something, I don't remember what. I believe it was "How's that?" or "What a pity," or something equally fatuous. Gethryn coughed. I made that half-turning movement which is the Englishman's awkward preparation for making one person known to another. I mumbled the usual rigmarole and Belton repeated the handshake and the smile. He also went on talking, giving neither of us a chance. He said:

"I'm very pleased indeed to meet you, Colonel Gethryn." He flashed two more of those smiles, the first at Gethryn, the second at me. "In fact, I hope Mr. Lawless will excuse me, but you, Colonel Gethryn, are the real reason for my being here to-night. I was driving by in my car when I happened to see yours, Colonel—" (another smile)—"yes, I know it, you see—standing outside Mr. Lawless's home, and on the impulse of the moment I just

naturally stopped the car a few yards up the hill, got out and came back and asked whether Mr. Lawless was at home. Your housekeeper, Mr. Lawless, told me that you were out, but she thought that you would return at any moment, and the long and short of it is that she asked me to wait, and wait I did——"

He broke off, looking from one to the other of us. I played the little host. I got them drinks and sat them down. Gethryn took one of my cigarettes but Belton, with many rather florid politenesses, asked to be allowed to smoke a cigar of his own, and had it. There was an uncomfortable pause. I tried some appealing glances at Gethryn. I wasn't myself feeling much like making conversation, but he either didn't or wouldn't—I should say wouldn't—take any hints. It was Belton himself who started. He said:

"I've got a motto, gentlemen, and that is 'Brass Tacks.' Mr. Lawless and I are acquainted but no more. You and I, Colonel, are not even that. Mr. Lawless and you are wondering what in this sweet world I'm doing here, and so I propose to tell you. I'm here, gentlemen, because I know that Colonel Gethryn—well, I don't *know* but I am just guessing—that Colonel Gethryn, being Colonel Gethryn, is inter*ess*ted in this most deplorable calamity, the death of my very good friend Sir Charles Grenville."

He had begun this conversation by talking to us both; that is to say, he had looked first at me while he was speaking, then at Gethryn, then at me again and so on. As he worked up, however, I faded out, just as I had done in Aviss's room a few moments ago.

"When I think, Colonel, of that dear little lady who adored Charles; when I think of that magnificent estate which now lacks a man's guiding hand; when I think of my own feelings in the matter—which I trust I manage to

control; when I think of all these things I get set afire with one idea, and that one idea is this: the man who killed Charles Grenville has got to hang. The police, Colonel, have taken up the man Dinwater. They may or may not be correct. If they are correct, then well and good. If they are not correct"—he was staring at Gethryn with his large eyes; very large eyes they were and very fine; I should think that many women had succumbed to them—"or if their case is not complete and they don't know where to turn to complete it, they'll come to you. And if they come to you, they've come to the right man. The world knows your record, Colonel; the world knows how, if you will forgive me, how diabolically clever you are at this sort of game, but nevertheless my reason for coming here is to try and help you. And when I say help you, I'm not being presumptuous, Colonel. I'm just trying to give you out of my knowledge and intuition a short cut. If there's anything you don't understand, if there's any back-of-the-curtain stuff that you want to nose out, if by any chance Dinwater is not guilty, there's just one step that will save you a whale of a lot of trouble, and that step is this: Investigate the doings, so far as they bear on this matter, of a certain resident about these parts going by the name of Aviss. Earl J. Aviss."

He broke off here and stood up. He turned and threw half the cigar into my fireplace. He said:

"People around here'll tell you that Aviss and I don't get on. That's true. But believe me, Colonel, I'm not saying this out of any childish spite. I'm saying this because I don't know about Aviss. What's he doing here, anyhow? Who is he? What is he? Where in the States did he come from? Why does he haunt this part of the world every summer? Why, whenever I've spoken of him to Charles or Lady Grenville, have I been sidetracked? Why—because,

thank God, I'm a Canadian, and, thank God, was a friend to poor old Charles—has this man gone out of his way to show his enmity towards me? This is a strange business, Colonel, and Aviss is a strange character. There may be some connection. . . . That's all." He squared his shoulders like a man who has got rid of a burden. He fumbled in the beautiful white waistcoat and brought his hand away holding a black-rimmed monocle, which he polished upon a handkerchief and then rammed into his left eye. I had seen that monocle before, I think, but I had forgotten it. It gave him a look completely unreal. I have known men who wear monocles so that you could almost have sworn they were born with them. Belton wasn't one of these. He stood there, his hands behind his back, looking at Gethryn.

Gethryn who, at the beginning of this party, had seemed as near to sleep as a man may be without flagrant rudeness, was now, and obviously, very wide awake. He sat upright in his chair, leaning a little forward. His odd eyes almost blazed. He said:

"That's good of you, Mr. Belton! Damn good! I'll bear in mind what you tell me all the more because I believe it'll straighten out a lot I've discovered for myself. Mind you, I'm not really mixed up in this business, not officially, anyhow. But I *am* interested. I can't disguise that I'm interested."

Belton beamed. The white teeth showed, the little black moustache twitched up at the corners. The monocle glistened in my lamplight. He said:

"Very glad indeed to have been of help, Colonel."

Gethryn leaned yet further forward in his chair. He looked up at Belton in eager anticipation. He said:

"Help me some more, Mr. Belton. . . .You've told me you're a Canadian; but were you ever in the States?"

Belton nodded. "I was in business in the States," he said, "for eight years. That is, from the end of the war until the middle of 1926."

Gethryn smacked his hand down on his knee. He stood up. He took a step and stood close to Belton, looking down at him from his four inches of superior height. He said:

"Were you ever in Illinois? Ever in Chicago?"

Belton shook his head. He looked sad. He said:

"Colonel, I wasn't. I was in Buffalo for two years and for the other four I was solely in New York."

"Hell!" said Gethryn. "Never mind. I was hoping for too much in the way of luck. Don't let what I said detract from my very real gratitude. And I hope we'll meet again."

"I'm sure we shall, Colonel." Belton took out the monocle and put it back in the pocket of the white waistcoat. He held out his hand. Gethryn shook it.

"Have another drink?" I said.

Belton shook his head. "If you'll excuse me, Mr. Lawless, I'll be getting along. I'm an early sleeper as a rule."

I excused him. I walked with him to the gate, bade him good-night—he insisted on shaking hands—and as I walked back to the house heard his sports Maxa banging its way off through the night.

I went back to Gethryn. He was doubled up in his chair; his legs were crossed and his eyes were closed. I poured out another drink and gave it to him. He opened one eye. He said:

"I don't need this but I want it. Thanks. . . . I say, know Farningham?"

"Obviously," I said.

"What time does Jefferson the solicitor's office open?"

I began to say: "Haven't the faintest," when I suddenly remembered. I had once had to get a lease witnessed in

Jefferson's office and I'd gone there on the way to an early call. I said:

"I know it's open at a quarter to ten. Earlier than that I can't say."

Gethryn nodded. "Thanks," he said.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

PERHAPS by way of compensation for that dream-ridden previous night, upon this one I got, quite literally, no sleep at all. Unpleasant in one way, but when I found I was getting too self-condolatory I'd only got to think of that dream about the policemen and horses to be glad of wakefulness. I think, between midnight, when I'd got into bed, and seven, when Mrs. Yule brought my tea, I must have read the whole of *Handley Cross*. I knew every word of it but sometimes that's the best kind of book to read when you're in the frame of mind I was. Seven o'clock came and with it, not only tea; Mrs. Yule, with that agitated wheezing which always attacks her when she's done something which she considers wrong, waved a long buff envelope at me. She said:

"Sir . . . sir . . . sir . . . can't think 'ow I came by mislookin' this yestiddy. Sir . . . I 'ope as there's nothing important."

I ripped the thing open. I suppose that until I'd read what was inside it, I must have been the only man, within a radius of thirty miles at the smallest, who didn't know that the coroner's inquest on the remains of Charles Falmont Grenville was to be held upon this very morning at ten-thirty at the Shire Hall in Farningham. Shows what my state of mind must have been. Usually I'm as receptive as the next, perhaps more so. I comforted Mother Yule, drank my tea and got up. This meant more telephoning. More applications to Clayton to be so good as to do my

work for me. Hateful business. I like old Clayton but as a vet. he ought to be shot.

(2)

"... Thank you, Lady Grenville. You may stand down. We may, I think, call you again but not just at present. ..."

She stood up. The usher, obsequious, drew back the clumsy, forbidding oaken chair. She was in black, with a gleam of white at throat and wrists. She was pale and there were heavy shadows beneath the gray eyes. But she was erect and the small head was proudly carried. I stared hungrily, as I had been staring for the few precious minutes she had sat there. And then I looked away. There was a savage, aching pain in my throat and I felt as if to breathe was neither possible nor desirable. It's odd; while she had been sitting I'd been able, to use a phrase hackneyed but adequate, to feast my eyes: but when she stood up and walked back to her place with that quiet, utterly delicious movement which was her walk, I couldn't look. I suppose that, of all these hundreds, mine were the only eyes which didn't avidly follow her every movement as she went back to her place—that chair which, cruelly and yet mercifully, was just hidden from me by a pillar of the balcony. . . . And not once had she so much as glanced toward me! And my seat was in the front rank of chairs immediately below the dais!

The coroner cleared his throat. Formal evidence of identification had been taken. The jury had seen the body. Only slightly out of chronological order, the police witnesses—Morley and Inspector Cross—had given their evidence concerning their calls at The Moon. The balloon was about to go up. The coroner took a sip of rather dusty-

looking water to help himself along. I looked round the tall, bare, high-windowed hall. On the dais, where, on many occasions I'd seen, when I'd come to give evidence in this case or that, the usually rather cheerful collection of fat-headed J. P.'s, was now a long trestle table, the coroner at its head and the twelve jurymen disposed about it. Somehow they gave me an uncomfortable feeling, that jury. I knew all of them except two and those two looked even more impressively and unimaginatively sub-human than their fellows. For the rest, a lot of policemen, a sprinkling of witnesses of whom I was one, many chairs and Farningham's Beadle—the ancient Rodder—the one old-worldliness, if you except the Choristers' Tower, which Farningham has to attract American tourists. Where I sat was ground level. If you looked up—as I had only once—you saw that the balcony was packed; packed almost, I'd have thought, to the point of danger. I believe that never before, and certainly never since, has more than one tenth of that crowd been in that balcony at one time. I only took the one look. The sight of those tiers of white staring bladders which were human faces made me feel the same sort of sickness which I imagine most of the wilder animals feel behind bars. I confined my attention to my own level. I looked everywhere for Gethryn but could not see him.

"Call Arthur Freethy."

I wondered who Arthur Freethy could be. When Arthur Freethy came, shambling, he was a hobbledehoy youth whom I believed I remembered seeing hanging about Samsford over week-ends. Arthur Freethy did not take long, which was just as well because Arthur Freethy was so nervous that even to watch him was torment.

"You are Arthur Freethy? You live at Longhole Cottages, Little Weyford?"

"Yezzir."

"Will you please tell the jury what you did on the evening of Friday last, the 18th of August, after you had finished your work?"

"Avter finished wurk, went whoam and 'ad waash. 'Ad bite zupper, then warked 'cross park to Samsford."

"At what time did you walk across the park?"

"'Twould be somewheres around twenty avter eight when started. It wore nine minnits to eight by Moon clock when got to Moon."

"You crossed the park by the right-of-way?"

"Aye."

"When you crossed the steps which lead over the gap in the wall at the Samsford end of the right-of-way, did you notice anything unusual?"

"Naw."

"Nothing at all?"

"Naw."

"There was nothing lying at the foot of those steps or near them?"

"Naw."

"Was anybody with you on this walk?"

"Yezzir."

"Who was this?"

"Yoong Wal Formby, but 'e's in dock wi' broaken ankle over to Farrow."

"I see. . . . We have here, gentlemen, a written statement from this man Formby corroborating what this witness has told us. If you have nothing more to ask him, gentlemen . . . ? Thank you. . . . Freethy, you may stand down. Call George Welby."

A great shuffling from the row in front of me. The massive Welby, small head sunk between vast shoulders, unwieldy body crammed into shiny Sunday suit, shambled

out of his seat and crossed to the vacant chair which faced the coroner at the other end of the long table.

"You are George Welby? You live at Minters Cottage, Samsford?"

"Yezzir."

"You are employed as a farm labourer on the farm of Mr. Nickells at Upper Samsford?"

"Yezzir."

"On the night of Friday last, the 18th of August, did you cross the corner of Samsford Park from West Hill to the mill at Samsford by the right-of-way?"

"Yezzir."

"What time did you make this journey?"

"Be aboot 'alf of eight when started."

"And you reached the steps leading through the gap in the wall at the Samsford end of the right-of-way at what time?"

"'Boot quarter of nine."

"Now, Welby, will you please tell me and the jury in your own words what you found at the foot of the steps and your actions immediately following the discovery."

"Found Sir Charles lyin' all of a 'eap rayte at foot of steps. Nigh trod on 'is face."

The coroner—he was a small, alert-looking, self-satisfied little man—repeated this in English for the benefit of his jury, most of whom understood Welby far better. He said at the end:

"Now, Welby, what did you do after finding Sir Charles' body?"

"Lifted 'un up an' carried 'un to Moon."

"You raised the body and carried it over to The Moon inn. Why did you do that?"

No answer. This was too much for George. He scratched his head and looked blank.

"Well, well, never mind. I assume that acting on the spur of the moment, perhaps not even being sure that Sir Charles was dead, you thought the best and quickest way to get help was to carry the body to the nearest house. Is that so?"

"Yezzir."

"And when you got to The Moon, what did you do?"

"Open' door and let 'un drop."

"I see. You opened the door and placed the body inside. . . . No further questions for this witness, gentleman. . . . You may stand down, Welby. We may want you again later. . . . Call Alfred Eustace Dinwater."

Great commotion. I tried not to look but must say that ordinary brutish curiosity got the better of me. From the side of the hall by the back doors came a little stir. I'd seen the group before and so, I suppose, had all those with me on this low level. But no one in the balcony could have seen. Dinwater was a very small, trim, alert figure, between two massive yokel policemen. He was in his "Sunday blacks." He had shaved. He had on clean linen and a high collar which gave glistening evidence of its spongeable nature. A black tie surrounded this edifice, a black tie which was pushed through a half-inch-wide gold ring. He held himself straight and very square. He walked as always he'd walked with a little spring from heel to toe. But his face was lined and haggard and of a curious grayness not at all pleasant to look at. His small eyes were quick and bright like a bird's. He didn't turn his head but the eyes darted glances everywhere. There was a rustle and excited murmuring in the gallery, murmuring which grew almost to a babel. The coroner beat the deal with his gavel. He glared up and round like an infuriated thrush. Silence came slowly. By the time it was reëstablished Dinwater was seated. Under arrest or no, he was here as an

ordinary witness. His warders stood at a discreet ten-foot distance behind his chair.

"You are Alfred Eustace Dinwater? You are the licensee of The Moon Public House in Samsford?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were serving in The Moon on the evening of Friday last, the 18th of August?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you serving in the bar for the whole of that evening?"

"'Ow d'you mean, sir?"

"I mean, were you down in the lower and public premises of The Moon for the whole of the time that evening that the public house was lawfully open?"

"No, sir."

"Were you downstairs on the public premises between 9:30 p.m. and 10 p. m. on that evening?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have heard the evidence of the last witness, George Welby?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you tell these gentlemen in your own words what happened at approximately 9:45 on that evening?"

"I can, sir. Nothink. Nothink, that is to say, out of the usual run."

"What's that? What's that? I don't understand you."

"You said to me, sir, what 'appened at approximately 9:45 on that evenin' and I said, nothink out of the usual run and I mean it. If you was to ask me now what 'appened at 9:50 prompt by my clock what's right by the radio, I could tell you."

"This quibbling will do you no good, Dinwater. You know very well what my question was leading to. Tell the jury at once."

"At 9:50 I'm standin' be'ind the cahnter that separates the bar passage from my part of the 'ouse. That's direckly opposite the porch door. I'm talking to Jimmy Taylor and suddenly I 'ears a thud as you might say against the porch door and it sort of busts open and somethink tumbles inside.

"First I 'ad the idee that it was some fellow what 'ad got boozed down at The Feathers. We often gets *them.* Then I looks again and sees there's somethink funny about 'im. And then I looks again and sees Welby's face, very 'orrified-like, peerin' in. He can't speak—he hardly ever can—but he's pointin'. I whips rahned the cahnter and no sooner 'as I done this an' I sees that this 'ere's a stiff. I've seen too many stiffs in my time not to know one when I sees one. Before I do anythink, Mr. Lawless, 'e comes skippin' out o' the saloon an' kneels dahn aside the body and starts a-examin' of it."

"Now, Dinwater, at what point did you realize whose this body was?"

"You mean, sir, when did I recognize the Captain, should say, Sir Charles? . . . Why, 'e was all of aneap-like when first Welby lets 'im slide in and it wasn't till I was rahnd the cahnter an' almost atop of 'im, as you might say, as I saw who it was and a nasty turn it give me."

"I see. And what did you do, Dinwater, when you found that Mr. Lawless had reached the body before you and was examining it?"

"Well, sir, I sez to meself, what does A do? Then I thinks, keep the mob off. So I jest backs into the door of the public and doesn't let any of the yobs get out. At the same time, sir, I yells out to Mary, that's my girl, and tells 'er to double rahnd an' fetch the police."

"I see. Any further questions at this stage for this wit-

ness, gentlemen? . . . You can stand down, Dinwater. We may want you again later."

"Yes, sir."

"Call Michael Lawless."

They called Michael Lawless. The unfortunate fellow stood up and threaded his way toward that suspicious, unfriendly-looking chair. I hoped that my gait didn't show that wobbling at the knees which most decidedly I felt. I sat down.

"Your name is Michael Lawless? Your profession is veterinary surgeon. You are a member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons?"

"Yes."

"You live at Little Thatches in the village of Samsford and conduct a veterinary practice from there?"

"Yes."

"You were, I understand, the first person properly to examine the body of Sir Charles Grenville on the night of Friday last, the 18th of August?"

"Yes."

"Now, Mr. Lawless, you have heard the evidence of the preceding witnesses?"

"Yes."

"Is there anything in that evidence with which, from your knowledge of what took place, you disagree?"

"No."

"So that you are, I take it, prepared to substantiate the order of events after the entrance of Welby with the body of Sir Charles as it was just now explained to us by the witness Dinwater?"

"Yes."

"No disagreement whatever?"

"No."

"Mr. Lawless, will you please tell the jury the

result of your examination of the body of Sir Charles Grenville?"

"I found that life was extinct and that death had been caused by a bullet wound to the head. The bullet had entered the left temple and had come out at a corresponding spot on the right temple. There was very little blood. There seldom is in head-wound cases."

"May I take it, Mr. Lawless, that you are experienced in medical work as differentiated from veterinary work?"

"You may. As well as being a vet., I am a qualified physician and surgeon. I was a commissioned officer in the R. A. M. C. in France and Flanders from June 1916 until the Armistice."

"I see. Mr. Lawless, what opinion did you form as to the length of time which had elapsed between your examination of the body and the expiration of life?"

"It is difficult to speak with any exactitude on these matters. All I will commit myself to is to say that, in my opinion, life had been extinct for not less than one hour and not more than three. That, you must understand, is purely a personal opinion."

"I see. Thank you. No further question, gentlemen? . . . You may stand down, Mr. Lawless. We may want you again later."

I stood down. As I edged my way back to my seat I caught one glimpse of Sheila. She was sitting with her hands folded in her lap, looking straight before her. She might, by her attitude, have been alone and in her own room. But just before that pillar cut off my view again, she raised one hand to her head. The hand was going to make some minor feminine adjustment, but though it moved slowly and calmly, I could see that its fingers were trembling. And then I reached my seat and my view was again cut off.

"Call Felix Grand. . . . You are Felix Grand? You are a qualified physician?"

"Yes."

"You reside at The Boltons, Samsford, and conduct your practice from there?"

"Yes."

"You are also, in addition to your private practice, police surgeon for the Farningham district?"

"Yes."

"At midnight on Friday last, the 18th of August, you were summoned to the mortuary in Farningham to examine the body of Sir Charles Grenville?"

"Yes."

"May I ask, Dr. Grand, whether you can substantiate the statements made by Mr. Lawless in regard to the cause of death?"

"Yes. Death was caused by the entry of a bullet into the left temple which passed out at the right temple. Death must have been instantaneous. . . . Thank God!"

"I see. Dr. Grand, do you agree with the evidence of the last witness in regard to the approximate time of death?"

"No—er—that is, it is difficult to say. I did not examine the body until just after midnight. Mr. Lawless examined the body at 10 p.m. and was, therefore, two hours nearer to the actual death. But, Mr. Coroner, I should give it as my opinion that when I saw the body, death had supervened at least not less than three hours and not more than five hours previously."

"I see. Not less than three . . . not more than five . . . That makes your opinion, Dr. Grand, coincide exactly with Mr. Lawless's."

"Er—I——"

"Now, Dr. Grand, from your experience, both as a private and public medical man, can you give me any

opinion as to the distance from which you would estimate the shot which killed Sir Charles Grenville to have been fired?"

Old Grand grew very pompous and I writhed in my seat. He kept half turning his head and shooting glances of condescending dislike toward where I sat. He said, after a good deal of thought, during which I suppose he imagined —and probably quite rightly—the whole hall was "hanging on his lips":

"Mr. Coroner, you have asked me a very, very difficult question. As a scientific man"—here the silence was very nearly shattered by a hollow laugh from Michael Lawless —"as a scientific man, I find it very distasteful to give answers to that sort of question—although, I realize, of course, the duty which prompted it. . . . I can tell you this, Mr. Coroner: if that bullet had been fired at a very close range, say, at any distance between one foot and twelve feet, the wound made by the bullet's entry would have been of a very different character. It would not have been so clean and it would not have been so small. It might, quite conceivably, have borne blackened marks round its edges. But when you get over that maximum distance of, say, twelve or fifteen feet, it becomes very much more difficult to detect, from the size of the wound, what distance the shot was really fired from." The coroner began to fidget. The jury still gazed with rapt, moonlike faces at this expert, who went on blandly: "I would give it as my considered opinion that that shot was fired from a distance of over fifteen feet and a distance of not more than sixty yards." He sat back in his chair and crossed plump white hands upon his comfortable belly.

I really believe that if I'd had by me something throwable and heavy and preferably with sharp edges, I'd have hurled it at him. I'd seen his mind working. I'd even seen

him begin—though he repressed the movement before it had gone very far—to throw a glance over his shoulder toward that corner where Dinwater sat between his two policemen.

The old illegitimate was playing up to existing circumstances and hoping thereby to achieve a reputation for shrewd deduction. He knew—who didn't?—that Dinwater was under arrest. He knew that the body had been found at the foot of the steps. He knew that, therefore, Dinwater, if he had shot Grenville, must have shot him either from the upper story of The Moon or from the branches of the tree behind The Moon. He knew that The Moon was fifty yards from the steps. He knew that the tree was not more than sixty. Any blistering idiot could have told that that shot wasn't fired from more than fifteen feet. Hence this flow of wisdom! That was what I thought at the moment. A few moments later—I suppose my subconscious mind had been worrying the subject—I thought of another possibility and gaped. . . . The stuff went down well. The coroner, who had treated Felix with tenderness right from the beginning, was now almost Heaplike. He soaped his hands. He beamed. He made two jerky little bows across the length of the table. He said:

"Thank you, Dr. Grand. A very able exposition. I don't think we need trouble you any more. . . . Do you agree, gentlemen? . . . Call Earl James Aviss. . . . Your name is Earl James Aviss? . . . You reside temporarily at The Gables, Upper Samsford?"

"Yes."

"You were in the saloon bar of The Moon public house on the night of Friday last, the 18th of August?"

"Yes."

"You have heard the evidence of the preceding witnesses?"

"Yes."

"Over what period, Mr. Aviss, were you in the saloon bar of the public house upon the evening in question?"

"Well, Judge, I'm not so good at remembering times and dates and details of that character. I can only state broadly that I was there for approximately two hours—that is, from half after eight to half after ten."

"Thank you. Now, Mr. Aviss, will you please tell the jury your version of the arrival of the witness Welby with the body of Sir Charles Grenville?"

"I will, your honour. I've really nothing to add to the very correct descriptions of this unhappy occurrence given first by Mr. Dinwater and second by Mr. Lawless. I was standing in the saloon bar in such a position as to be able to see right down the passage into the public bar. There was a sort of a thud at the door and then it opens and in drops the body. Behind the body, standing in the door frame, was Welby. I didn't myself immediately move from where I stood; I guess I was what they call dumbfounded. I remember Mr. Lawless pushing past me and running into the passage and kneeling down by the body and beginning to examine it."

"Thank you, Mr. Aviss. You have nothing else that you wish to tell us? No details which occur to your memory and have not been reported in your hearing in this court?"

"No, your honour."

"Thank you, Mr. Aviss. You may stand down. We may want further evidence from you later, but I think it unlikely."

"I'll be right here."

"Thank you. . . . Call Roger Burford. . . . You are Roger Burford? You reside at Larch Cottage, Samsford?"

"Yes."

"You are employed as bailiff or agent to the Samsford Park Estate?"

"Yes."

"Were you, Mr. Burford, in the saloon bar of The Moon public house on the night of Friday last, the 18th of August?"

"I was."

"You were in the saloon bar at the time of the entry of the witness Welby with the body of Sir Charles Grenville?"

"I was."

"You have heard the evidence of all the preceding witnesses?"

"I have."

"Have you anything to add to that testimony which you have heard or any difference of opinion with that testimony?"

"I have not."

"You are quite satisfied, Mr. Burford, that between them the previous witnesses have given a full and correct account of the shocking incident?"

"Perfectly satisfied."

"Thank you, Mr. Burford. You may stand down. I don't think we shall require any further evidence from you, but you will please remain in court."

"Very well."

"Call Sarah Goodenough. . . ."

The big hall, a moment ago full of rustlings and whispers, coughings and bored scraping of chairs, was suddenly as quiet as an empty chapel. From somewhere at the back of the hall, a good distance behind where I was sitting, a girl pushed her way out into the aisle and walked up to the dais, mounted the steps, and seated herself in the chair. A tall dark girl, handsome, with that high-coloured, bold type of rustic attractiveness. She was soberly dressed in

good clothes which by their very lack of ornament proclaimed themselves practically uniform. She fidgeted with the bag upon her knees and sent glances this way and that among the jury. An excited murmur broke out from somewhere in the gallery. The coroner rapped the table with his gavel and began. He said:

"You are Sarah Goodenough? You are employed as lady's maid by Lady Grenville?"

"Yes, sir." Her speech was better somehow than one had expected. Her voice was loud without noisiness and as bold as her eyes.

"You have been in Lady Grenville's service for how long?"

"Two years, sir, come the third of November."

"You were on duty throughout the day and evening of Friday last, the 18th of August?"

"Yes, sir."

The coroner, I think for the first time, took more than a glance at the papers which were in a neat pile by his right hand. He said at last, raising his head:

"Will you please tell the jury in your own words exactly what you heard of the conversation between Sir Charles and Lady Grenville at 6:30 p.m. on Friday last?"

The girl sat bolt upright—suddenly, as if someone had pricked her. She stared at the coroner with her fine eyes. She said:

"There wasn't anything, sir. Nothing at all. I don't know——"

"Now, Miss Goodenough, when you were visited by the sergeant of the Farningham police you made a statement to him. Am I to understand that you now wish to retract this in whole or in part?"

White teeth suddenly showed between her rather overfull lips. They caught at the lower of these lips before she

spoke. She turned in her chair and made a movement as if to look toward the back of that shadowed recess where Dinwater sat beween his two guards, but she checked the movement. She said:

"No, sir. But I didn't think——"

"Now, Miss Goodenough! Never mind what you think, tell us what you know. I don't want much from you. All I want is to hear you tell these gentlemen what you told the police."

"Very good, sir. I was arranging things in her ladyship's bedroom as I generally do about that time——"

"What time are you speaking of? Tell the jury."

"Between six and half-past, sir."

"Thank you. Proceed."

"Well, sir, I was arranging things in the bedroom as I said. Her ladyship was sitting reading in her boudoir which opens out of the bedroom like. The door was open and I heard the boudoir door open and the ma—— I mean Sir Charles came in. I didn't take no notice, not being the sort that's always bursting themselves to listen." She broke off here and fumbled in the bag and produced a handkerchief which she plucked at with nervous fingers.

"Go on, Miss Goodenough, go on! You heard Sir Charles come in. Did he speak to Lady Grenville? Or Lady Grenville to him?"

"Yes, sir, just in the ordinary way. Even if I'd been trying, which God forbid, I don't suppose I could of heard what they were saying."

"I see. But later, owing perhaps to a change in your position in the bedroom or perhaps to the raising of voices, you did hear?"

"Y—yes, sir." She hesitated here, then went on without any further pause. She seemed to have made up her mind to get the nasty job over as quickly as might be. She said:

"Yes, sir. I did hear just a sort of murmur as you might say, and then suddenly the ma—— Sir Charles began to speak louder, a lot louder. He sounded very angry, and when she answered him, Lady Grenville—neither of them shouted—she was, natural-like, a bit louder too. But I didn't hear much, not wanting to, as you might say, but I couldn't help hearing the ma—— Sir Charles saying: 'I can't, and that's that!' And then her ladyship says: 'Charles, but you must!' Then the master—Sir Charles—he swore at her something terrible. I couldn't catch half of it, and he said something like he was fed up with the whole something pack, and then her ladyship says very calm-like: 'Very well, but it really seems to me that out of sheer courtesy you could make your appointments with people like Dinwater at a slightly less inconvenient time.' And then the master said, begging your pardon, sir: 'To bloody hell with Dinwater and you too!' and then he slams out of the room."

"I see. Thank you, Miss Goodenough. Now perhaps you would tell the jury at what time it was that Sir Charles went out after this—this interview with Lady Grenville?"

"Yes, sir. I happen to know the time because just as I was going out of the bedroom door her ladyship comes into the bedroom and she happens to ask me the time, her clock having stopped. I looked at my watch, sir—I always wear one—and told her. It wanted two minutes to half-past six, sir."

"I see. Thank you, Miss Goodenough. You may step down. Call Robert Bland. . . . You are Robert Bland? You are employed as butler at Samsford Hall?"

"That is so, sir."

"How long have you been in that position?"

"I was engaged as butler, sir, when Sir Charles first

came to reside at the Hall immediately after his marriage four years ago."

"Thank you. Now, Bland, will you please tell the jury in your own words what took place when you were, I understand, arranging the papers on the table in the large hall upon the evening of Friday last, the 18th of August?"

"Yes, sir. I was, as you say, arranging the papers. I was alone. I heard someone coming down the stairs at a great pace and I looked up to see that it was Sir Charles."

"He seemed agitated?"

"Extremely, sir, but I should perhaps tell you, sir, that this was not an unusual occurrence. Sir Charles was, if I may put it that way, a gentleman of rather—er—excessively—er—hasty temper."

"I see. So when you saw Sir Charles as he was running down the stairs and as he stood in the hall, you noticed that he was out of temper but did not place any special significance upon that fact as it was not an uncommon occurrence for him to be in this mood?"

"Precisely, sir." Bland waited. I blessed the old man. I don't know why, but he was refreshing after the other witnesses. He was perfectly courteous, he gave perfectly straightforward answers, but he didn't seem anxious to do any more than was needed of him. Quite right too. The coroner was on him at once.

"Now, Bland, did you have any word with Sir Charles on this occasion which you are describing?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you please, then, tell the jury the import of your talk?"

"Certainly, sir. Sir Charles first took me to task because as a rule there is a whisky decanter, siphon, and glasses laid out upon a tray on the small oak table just by the foot of the stairs. Sir Charles was annoyed because at this

moment this tray was not there. I replied that it had been there but that I had sent the footman back with it to the pantry because the tray was not properly laid, the glasses were not properly cleaned, and the decanter was not properly full."

"I see. Did Sir Charles have any other talk with you on this occasion?"

"Yes, sir. Sir Charles then told me to fetch a hat. I fetched a hat. He clapped it on his head and said: 'I may be late for dinner. I don't suppose if I am I'll get any in this house.' He used many oaths in this sentence, sir, which I do not trouble to repeat."

"And that was all?"

"No, sir. I said to Sir Charles, following him to the door: 'Have you any orders, sir? Would you like anything left?' And he said, or rather shouted, if you know what I mean, sir: 'No, damn you, no! God knows what time I'll be back!' And then he went out of one of the side doors, slamming it behind him."

"Now then, Bland, can you tell us what time it was when Sir Charles went out?"

"Yes, sir. At least I can tell you to within five minutes. It was somewhere between 6:30 and 6:35."

"And that was the last you saw of your master?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you, Bland, that will do. You may step down. Call Thomas Joseph Wilkins. . . ."

Thomas Joseph Wilkins was called, and after him a round half-dozen—perhaps more, I have forgotten—of servants. A painstaking person, this coroner, and rather unnecessarily laborious I thought. All of these servants went through the formula: "When did you last see Sir Charles?" The answers were varied but none of them gave the time later than 5:45, so that we were left, even when

the outside servants—stable men, game-keepers, and such—were questioned, with the girl Goodenough and old Bland as the last two people who saw or heard Grenville alive.

"Call Thomas Marsh. . . . Your name is Thomas Marsh? You are employed as an under-keeper in Samsford Park?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have been in that employment how long?"

"Twelvemonth, sir."

"Will you kindly tell the jury in your own words of the conversation which you have stated to the police you overheard between Sir Charles Grenville, deceased, and Alfred Dinwater on the 18th of July last?"

"Very good, sir. It was this way: I was just on my rounds like and I come to the end of the copse that looks out over the park as it runs alongside Samsford. I don't know whether the gentlemen know the lie o' the land but there's a grass strip and a path jest underneath the wall on the level like and then there's a sharp rise and the copse begins. I was jest inside the trees on the top side of this jest opposite the steps that ends the right-o'-way. That's on the day in question, sir and gentlemen, at about half-past four in the arternoon. I stopped there because there'd been a deal of poachin' goin' on and I jest seen a couple snares. Jest, as you might say, the ordinary wire-work. I was kneeling down behind a big beech and scoopin' um out when looking up I sees Sir Charles coming over the steps from the Samsford side. Jest as he got to the bottom of the steps I hears a sort of shout and sees Dinwater coming along. Him and Sir Charles starts to talk. I was a bit surprised like because of the way Sir Charles stopped when this Dinwater yelled at him in the way he might have yelled at me but wouldn't twice. I goes on with my job, not quite knowing what to do, but thinkin' p'r'aps this was the best way. I works at what I have to do and

what I'm paid to do I does, irrespective as you might say of circumstances. I'd no call to listen and must say as I didn't want to, but voices was as you might say raised so high that I couldn't of helped myself if I'd tried. What they was doing, gentlemen, was quarrelling. Now I knew this Dinwater had been what you might call a 'proteege' of the guv'nor's—I beg your pardon, sir, I mean Sir Charles—but even so I thought to myself it was a bit hot. And it was. Sir Charles he didn't seem for the first two or three minutes to get a word in edgeways. This Dinwater, he was just blackguarding him——"

"One moment, Marsh, one moment! You say Dinwater was 'blackguarding' Sir Charles?"

"Yes, yer honour."

"One moment, one moment, let me finish! You say this Dinwater was 'blackguarding' Sir Charles? What exactly do you mean? Did you hear any of the words used or catch the gist of the conversation?"

"Well, it was like this, sir. I heard a good many words and some of them that was used I wouldn't repeat them in front of you, gentlemen. As for the meaning of what was said, I can't say that I did. All I got—me not listening like, as you might say, but being forced to over'ear to some extent—all I could gather was that, extryordin'ry though it may seem to you gentlemen and as undoubtedly it was, this Dinwater was blackguarding Sir Charles who, as you might say, was his master——"

"One moment, Marsh. One moment! Not quite so fast, please. You mustn't get carried away by your own eloquence here. You are here, you must understand, to explain to this court, who know nothing of the circumstances, exactly what took place. You mustn't race away like this."

"Very good, sir; I'm sure I'd no intention——"

"All right, Marsh. All right! You have told us now that

on this date, the 18th of July, at the time you mention, you overheard a disagreement of some kind between Sir Charles and Alfred Dinwater. You say that you gathered that Dinwater was, shall we say, speaking disrespectfully to Sir Charles."

"Disrespectfully you may well say, sir, and a good deal more! If I may say, the word disrespectfully——"

"Marsh! You must not air your views in this court! You must keep strictly to what I ask you to tell."

"Very good, sir. I'm sorry, sir. I'm sure I had no intention of being in any way——"

"Marsh! Will you kindly answer my questions and confine yourself to answering them in as few words as possible?"

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir."

"Now, then! Can you tell the jury and me any of the words other than merely vulgarian epithets which you heard Dinwater use upon that occasion to Sir Charles Grenville?"

"No, sir. I'm afraid I can't. If you was to ask me for the vulgar ethipets I could write 'em down for you. There was a great many, but there was also a great many seemingly obscene terms which, not rightly understanding and me not exactly listening as you might say, I can't remember properly."

"I see. You cannot give us any idea, then, of any of these expressions?"

"No, sir. Not nearer than to say there was something kept cropping up about Jack and Jacko. By cropping up I mean to say in Dinwater's speech. He kept saying Jacko or something like that. It didn't seem to make no sense to me, but it seemed to make Sir Charles real riled."

"All right, Marsh. Anything else you can remember?"

"No, sir, not rightly. The only other words I could get rightly was something about Blanking fear."

"Now, Marsh, when you say 'blanking fear,' is that how you say it? . . ."

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. When you say 'blanking fear' are you intending to infer that the word before 'fear' is one which you don't like to utter in these precincts?"

"No, sir. That's not my meaning at all. When I say 'blanking fear' I mean that's like—only *like*, mind you!—this word or words that I kept on hearing Dinwater say to Sir Charles, all mixed up with this jack-jacko stuff."

"I see. Very well, Marsh. You have told us about this jack-jacko and that other expression. What I would like you to turn your very strict attention to now is to explaining as much as you can to the jury and myself any idea you may have gathered as to the cause of this—er—unpleasantness between the two men."

"I'm sorry, sir, as I've said I've no idee, me as you might say not, as it were, trying to listen——"

"Quite, Marsh. Quite! Very admirable I'm sure, but all the same I would like to be quite certain, before I ask you to stand down, that you cannot tell us or give us any clue whatsoever to the cause of this—er—quarrel."

"I'm sorry, sir, it's not as if I ain't thought about it, because since this 'orrible affair I've done nothin' else; but there's no doubt I can't."

"Thank you, Marsh. You may stand down. We may need you later. . . . Recall Alfred Dinwater. . . ."

Once more that procession from the quiet corner by the big doors; once more Dinwater, still erect but now even more haggard than before, took the witness chair. He did not look about him but stared straight down the length of the table at the coroner. From where I sat I could see

him in profile. His tongue kept coming out to moisten parched lips. The coroner said:

"Now, Dinwater, you have heard the evidence of this last witness, Thomas Marsh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you, upon the day in question—the 18th of July—at the time stated, approximately 4:30 in the afternoon, have conversation with Sir Charles in the place described by the last witness? That is to say, at the foot of the steps at the end of the right-of-way across the park?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you, in fact, seek this interview? I mean, did you come running out of your house calling to Sir Charles? And did he stop and did you run up to the steps and cross them and start this interview upon the other side of the wall?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was the interview, as the last witness stated, of an—er—disagreeable or quarrelsome nature?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Dinwater, what was the cause of this—er—unpleasantness between you and Sir Charles?"

Silence. Not a stir or a shuffle or even the sound of breathing in that crowded place. Twice Dinwater opened his mouth as if to speak, and twice closed it. His tongue came out once more and moistened his lips. For a moment or two the coroner waited, then tapped impatiently upon the table with a pencil. He said:

"Come, Dinwater! Answer!"

A convulsive swallow marked the effort which the prisoner, now witness, had to make before speech would come. He said at last:

"Don't know as I'd say it were a *quarrel*, sir. I may've got a bit 'asty. Unfortunately I've got a very 'asty temper, but I'm sure——"

"Dinwater! Please confine yourself to answering my questions. I asked you to tell the court, the jury and myself, what was the cause of this scene between yourself and Sir Charles. Please do so!"

"Very good, sir. The cause of the row—or whatever you likes to call it, sir—was all along of a promise that Sir Charles had made me some time before and what I 'adn't considered 'e'd kept."

"What was it that Sir Charles had promised you some time ago?"

"Sir Charles, sir, when 'e first come into the title and come to live at the 'All 'ere, 'e brought me along with 'im—me 'avin' been then 'is confidential servant as you might say for ten years—and got me this landlord's job at The Moon, which as you probly know, sir, is one of the brewery's 'ouses. But when he got it for me, sir, 'e intimated like that it was only temp'ry and that shortly there'd be a much better job comin' along for me. Well, sir, I took his word like I always 'ave done, but after three or four years of it I said something to 'im again and 'e put me off like. And then I began to mention it more frequent, whenever I see 'im, as a matter of fact, and on the last time before this row—that'd be about six weeks before—'e put me off again. Then when I see 'im that day, lookin' out o' my window, I thinks: 'Ere's an opportunity,' and I calls out and runs after 'im and then we 'ad the discussion just as you said, sir."

"I see. You are trying to tell the jury that the cause of your attitude to Sir Charles and the words which took place was that you consider he had not lived up to the promise he had made to get you a better position?"

"That's correct, sir."

"H'm. . . . Now, Dinwater, you heard the evidence of the last witness and you heard his reference to words which

he did not understand. There was some talk of expressions like 'jacko' and one which sounded like 'blanking fear,' but was not in fact these words; merely some word or words which sounded like them."

"I heard, sir." Dinwater's mouth shut in a hard, tight line. His gray, set little face looked as if it were a carving in rock.

"What then, Dinwater, is your explanation of these words?"

"I've no idee, sir, what Mar—— what the witness was talkin' about. No idee whatsoever. I don't remember no jack-jacko stuff nor the other. Certainly no words like 'em ever passed my lips."

"Oh. . . . You adhere to that statement, Dinwater?"

"Most defi*nite*ly, sir."

"M'm. . . . Now, Dinwater, what was the conclusion of this—er—interview? I mean, on what understanding was it terminated?"

"None, sir, as usual. The Guv—— beg your pardon, sir, I mean Sir Charles—'e got very 'ot like towards the end and though 'e 'ad started to say something about what 'e was doin' like, 'e went off just sudden on the sort of understandin' that 'e'd see me in 'ell—beg pardon, sir—'e'd see me elsewhere before 'e got me anythink else. In fact, 'e said I ought to consider myself lucky if I kept the job I '*ad* got."

"Oh! Now, Dinwater, you have heard the evidence of the witness Goodenough, the lady's maid to Lady Grenville?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have heard what she said of the conversation she overheard on the night of Friday last between Lady Grenville and Sir Charles Grenville?"

"Yes, sir."

"You realize that the implication of that testimony was that Sir Charles at that time—6:30 p.m.—was about to see you; was, apparently, to go out to do so."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know anything of this? Was there in fact any understanding or appointment between you and Sir Charles that you should meet that evening?"

"No, sir."

"No? How do you explain the speech of Sir Charles, then?"

"Don't, sir. Can't understand it."

"You adhere to that statement, Dinwater?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Have you any further questions, gentlemen, which you wish to put to this witness at the present stage? . . . No? . . . Thank you. Dinwater, you may stand down for the present. Recall Police Inspector Cross. . . . Inspector, will you please tell the jury briefly of the enquiries made by you on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday last into this sad affair?"

"Very good, sir. I followed the usual routine and questioned all the available and likely witnesses. Witnesses, that is, both of the finding of the body and any event which I thought likely to have any possible connection with the death of the deceased. From these enquiries sir, the following gradually emerged: that Alfred Dinwater had quarrelled with Sir Charles on the 18th of July; that Sir Charles had made a statement on the evening of the 18th of August implying that he was due to have another interview with Dinwater; that, judging from the spot on which Sir Charles's body was found, death must have resulted from a shot fired, if Sir Charles was standing at the foot of the steps on the park side of the wall, from one of the upper windows of The Moon public house, or a shot fired, if Sir

Charles was standing at the top of the steps leading over the wall, from one of the boughs of the large oak tree in the small paddock behind The Moon public house. Enquiries elicited the further evidence that the only rifle in The Moon public house is one belonging to Dinwater who is the only person who can use it (it is a small-calibre rifle known usually as a rook rifle); that Dinwater was absent from the bar during a period between 8 and 9:20, during which time he may either have been upstairs in the small centre room which he uses as a den, or possibly outside the house, though not far distant from it, as his coat and boots were in the parlour behind the bar for the whole evening. On top of this, an important discovery was made by the police in the yard at the back of The Moon; this was a silencer to fit the type of rifle which Dinwater has. This silencer which you have there, sir, as one of your exhibits, was, although covered with the muck under which it had been hidden, in a well-greased and well-kept condition."

"Thank you. One moment, Inspector, while I hand round this exhibit to the jury. You may like to see this, gentlemen. . . .Thank you. Now, Inspector, the jury having done with this exhibit, there are just one or two further questions I would like to put to you. Firstly, were this silencer or a silencer of this type fitted to a rifle of this kind, would there be any audible report at all if the rifle were fired?"

"There would be a report, sir, but very faint. I should say that were a rifle fitted with an Ellery silencer to be fired outside those main doors there, the sound to our ears at this table would merely be a small and muffled thud, to which we would probably pay no attention."

"I see. You have conducted experiments?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Inspector, are there any other rifles of this type

owned to your knowledge by the inhabitants of Samsford and the surrounding district?"

"Yes, sir. A large number. There's a Rook Rifle Club with a small range at the top of Samsford hill. The membership of this club is approximately thirty and each member, I have ascertained, has one, and in some cases two, guns of this type."

"I see. And have you checked up the movements of the members of this club on the night of the murder?"

"So far as is possible, yes, sir. I may say that except in one case which the police have investigated and are—er—bearing in mind, there seems no base for supposing that any of these rifles were used that evening, except those of Mrs. Willington and Miss Grand, who used the range for a short while, the time of their arrival at the range being approximately 7:30 and their departure being approximately eight o'clock."

"Thank you, Inspector. Now, if none of the jury have any further questions which they would like me to put to you? . . . I beg your pardon? . . . Speak up a little, please. . . . Oh! I see. . . . Inspector, the jury wish to ask exactly where the range is situated in regard to the other places which we are speaking of, namely The Moon public house and the steps to the right-of-way."

"Certainly, sir. I was prepared for that. Perhaps if I give you this plan and you pass it round among the jury that will give the answer to the question."

"Thank you, Inspector. Please pass this round, gentlemen. . . . Any more questions? Thank you. . . . Inspector, you may stand down for the moment. Call Margaret Anastasia Willington. . . . Your name is Margaret Anastasia Willington? You reside at The Firs, Upper Samsford?"

"Yes."

"Are you a member of the Samsford Rook Rifle Club?"

"Yes. I am also the honorary secretary and treasurer."

"Did you, Mrs. Willington, go to the range and shoot there upon the evening or night of Friday last, the 18th of August?"

"Yes. I went with Miss Grand, Doctor Felix Grand's niece. She wished to improve her shootin' and so I chose a time at which I thought the range would be empty to give her a little coachin'. As far as I can remember we got to the range just after half-past seven and left it just after eight."

"Thank you. During that time, Mrs. Willington, no one else, I take it, came on to the range?"

"No."

"You saw no one else during the whole time you were there?"

"No."

"Did you do much shooting?"

"No. My coachin' was mainly confined to range findin', stance, and that sort of thing."

"But you did shoot during the course of the time you were on the range?"

"Yes, about half a dozen shots. Not altogether but separately. I think they were all used to illustrate particular points which I referred to."

"I see. I suppose you cannot give us any idea at what time these shots were fired?"

"Awfully sorry. 'Fraid I can't."

"I see. But do you think we might assume that these shots were fired at more or less regular intervals, say with roughly five minutes between each?"

"Sorry, 'fraid you can't. Can't swear, and I know Miss Grand can't either, because we've been talkin' about it, but I should say the shots were more likely in blocks of two. I

know one lot was, anyhow. But as I've said, I've no notion about it. Sorry an' all that."

"Not at all, Mrs. Willington. Now just one more question. Did you, while you were on the range, hear any shot or shots whatsoever from elsewhere?"

"We did not."

"I see. Well, if the jury have no further questions to ask ——I beg your pardon, sir? . . . Please speak up. . . . I see. Mrs. Willington, the jury wish me to ask you whether you have ever seen or heard of or used an Ellery silencer?"

"Not in my natural."

"They also wish me to ask whether, to your knowledge, any member of the club has ever referred to one of these instruments?"

"Never. Of course you can go round and ask the lot, but I'm sure you'll get the same reply."

"Thank you, Mrs. Willington. Any further questions, gentlemen? . . . You may stand down. Call Felicity Grand. . . ."

A girl I never remember having seen before—a girl of the usual sort of prettiness which means nothing—came from the back of the hall and sat in the high-backed chair. I think—I hope I'm not doing her an injustice—that she probably was, as she would have called it, "tickled to death" at the whole situation and more particularly with the fact that for a brief moment anyhow she was a "central figure."

"Your name is Felicity Grand? You are the niece of Dr. Felix Grand and are paying a visit to him?"

"Yes."

"You have heard the evidence of the last witness?"

"Yes."

"Was there anything in her testimony as given with which you disagree or which you would like to elaborate?"

"No-o-o, I don't—think so—only that perhaps—well, I think—I was probably wrong, though."

"Now, Miss Grand, make up your mind. It seems that you have something to tell us, after all. Will you please inform the jury and myself as to this or else make a definite statement that you have nothing to add to Mrs. Willington's evidence?"

"Well, you must forgive me—it was only that I thought—though very likely I was mistaken—it was only that I thought perhaps I did hear somebody shooting, apart from Mrs. Willington, of course I mean."

"I see. I gather, Miss Grand, that what you are trying to tell the jury is that during the time you were on the range with Mrs. Willington during the evening of Friday last you heard or thought you heard another shot or shots not fired on the range. Am I correct?"

"Ye-es. It was only an idea of mine, of course, but I did seem to remember when I heard you asking Mrs. Willington those questions just now that I did hear a sort of—well, it was more like a very far-away pop than anything else——"

"Excuse me, Miss Grand. Now at what time do you think it was that you heard this 'far-away pop'?"

"Well, I really don't think I could tell you. . . . I mean, that is—I don't think I could get sort of absolute Greenwich time—but I should think it must have been—well, I suppose when I heard it Mrs. Willington and I had been on the range for quite ten minutes—perhaps even twenty-five. I don't think it was quite half an hour, though——"

"Excuse me, Miss Grand. This seems rather too indefinite for the court, if I may say so. Can you not give us some better and closer opinion?"

"Well, if I *must*, then I think I'll say that I think I heard this shot a good ten minutes—no, no, I'll say a

quarter of an hour, fifteen minutes after Mrs. Willington and I got to the range. Now, as Mrs. Willington said that we got to the range about—and I think she must be right, she always *is* right about things like that—about half-past seven, that would make the time I heard this rather odd sort of noise, if you know what I mean—that would make the time about quarter to eight, wouldn't it?"

A very bright smile from the girl, a very subdued but hasty remark from the coroner.

"Thank you, Miss Grand, thank you. You may stand down. We shall not need you again."

"I see. Of course, I'm only too willing to——"

"Thank you, Miss Grand. If you wouldn't mind standing down. . . . Call Sir Humphrey Bleydon. . . ."

A great stir. Up the aisle comes the Madras-complexioned, white-moustached old boy who had been at lunch at the Hall on that extraordinary Friday; who was, I had heard or remembered since, the lord lieutenant of the county. The man, in fact, that Gethryn had been, and probably still was, staying with. As he puffed and panted his way up the dais steps I looked round for Gethryn again. Perhaps it was the twentieth time I had done so. But I couldn't see him. The coroner was obsequious.

"Now, Sir Humphrey, I don't think it will be necessary for us to take up very much of your extremely valuable time. If you would be so good as to just answer one or two questions which we have in the course of duty to put to you, I'm sure that we shall be able to get——"

"Ask away, man. Ask away! Don't *talk!!*"

"Ha-ha! Of course not. Yes. Er—well, Sir Humphrey, the first question which the court wishes to put before you——"

"Couldn't you ask me a question?"

"Certainly, Sir Humphrey. I believe that on the after-

noon of Friday last, the 18th of August, you were a luncheon guest at Samsford Hall?"

"Yes, yes, yes. Yes!"

"Now, Sir Humphrey——"

"Look here! I know my name and so do you. Shall we leave it out?"

"Certainly, Sir Humphrey. . . . I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing, nothing, nothing. Nothing!"

"Might I ask, Sir Humphrey, whether you were intimate with Sir Charles Grenville, deceased?"

"No, no. Nunno. Knew 'im, knew 'im. Knew his uncle very well. Good fellow, his uncle. Good man on a horse. Didn't know this one, not particularly."

"I see. We may take it, then, Sir Humphrey, that you were not upon terms of close personal friendship with——"

"Dammit! How many times d'you want a question answered? First I answer it twice, and then you have to go and answer it all over again."

"I'm sorry, Sir Humphrey, if our methods—which you must remember are those of the Law——"

"Good God, yes! Get on!"

"You must pardon me, Sir Humphrey, but I am afraid that I must conduct this inquest in my own way. Will you please tell us—these gentlemen and myself—whether during that luncheon party you noticed any agitation or nervousness or unusual behaviour upon the part of the deceased?"

"Not knowing the fellah, couldn't say whether he was unusual or not."

"I see. You cannot tell us. Perhaps I might ask you, however, whether you noticed any sense of strain or worry on the part of the deceased?"

"Matter of fact, the fellah was my host an' all that, but beyond that I took very little notice of him."

"I see. I see. Then so far as you were concerned, Sir Humphrey, we may take it that the luncheon party seemed an ordinary enough function of that type?"

"Yes, yes. Yes-yes. Anything else?"

"If you gentlemen have no questions which you would like to put to Sir Humphrey Bleydon? No? . . . Thank you, Sir Humphrey. We have finished. Call Miss Winifred Falcon."

I didn't know this name. I very much doubt whether at the time I actually heard it. I had suddenly become obsessed, for some reason or other which only my subconscious mind could tell you—and that won't split—with a need to make sure that Gethryn was here, and nowhere could I see him. It began to worry me. When I looked at the dais again I saw that seated in the witness chair was one of the girls who had been at that luncheon party—the one with the face like the back of a hansom. She was saying in answer to the coroner that: No, she had noticed nothing unusual at lunch; that, no, she had only once before that day met Lady Grenville and never before met Sir Charles Grenville; that, no, there had appeared to be nothing unusual in the behaviour of anyone at that luncheon party. This study in gray negatives was summarily dismissed.

"Call Anthony Ruthven Gethryn. . . ."

A small stir in the hall. I took it that that small stir was from those of the better-informed or more curious persons among the gathering who knew something of the man and his reputation.

"Call Anthony Ruthven Gethryn. . . ."

For the second time, nothing doing. Whispered consultation between the coroner and his clerk. Once more:

"Call Anthony Ruthven Gethryn. . . ."

Something doing. A stir at the back of the hall. The

*clonking* noise of one of the swing doors of the smaller entrance opening and shutting. Rapid footsteps down the echoing aisle, and then Gethryn in the witness chair. He looked to me very different from when I had last seen him. Perhaps this was because he had on, not clothes of light gray, but clothes of dark brown. He was, as usual, easily smart; but there was somehow to-day a touch of formality about the whole man. He, like Dinwater, looked neither to right nor left of him but straight down the length of the table at the birdlike little coroner.

"You are Anthony Ruthven Gethryn?"

"Yes."

"You are at present visiting Sir Humphrey Bleydon, lord lieutenant of this county?"

"Yes."

"You have heard the testimony of the previous witnesses?"

"No."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I'm sorry, I was late. Car trouble. Partly. I'm afraid I've only just entered the hall."

"I—see. Well, Colonel Gethryn, what I—that is, what the court wish to ask you is this: firstly, I understand that you were a guest at a luncheon party given by Sir Charles and Lady Grenville on Friday last, the 18th of August. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Just as a matter of form, Colonel Gethryn—I'm sorry to have to trouble you with these rather strange-seeming questions—just as a matter of form, will you tell the jury and myself whether you noticed anything unusual in the atmosphere of that luncheon party? By that I mean, was there anything unusual in the behaviour on the part of anyone present? Particularly did you notice anything

out of the way about the behaviour of Sir Charles Grenville?"

"Yes."

Have you ever, on a still day in a copse, heard the sudden flurry of that vicious breeze which makes you know that a storm is coming? If you have—and most people have—you will know almost exactly the sort of sound that went round the Shire Hall of Farningham on the heels of this monosyllable. The coroner started. His pince-nez slipped a little askew upon his beaklike nose. He adjusted them with hurried hand. He said:

"Do I understand, Colonel Gethryn, that your answer to my question is in the affirmative?"

"Yes."

"The court then are to understand that you did notice something unusual at this luncheon party?"

"Yes. And again, yes."

"I see. . . . Perhaps you would—er—tell the court in what—I should say how—that is—if you will tell the court the nature of this unusualness——"

"With pleasure. I'm afraid that I've nothing concrete to offer you but I can most definitely assure the court that upon two or more occasions the atmosphere of the luncheon party became strained, to say the least. In each case the strain—I'm afraid that's the best word I can find—emanated from the host."

"You suggest, Colonel Gethryn, that this atmosphere of strain originated every time you noticed it with Sir Charles Grenville?"

"Sir Charles Grenville was the host."

"Yes. Yes. Can you remember, Colonel, any of the conversation which led up to these periods of strain?"

"Clearly. The first was when mention was made of a Rook Rifle Club which apparently exists in the village of

Samsford. As soon as the subject arose Sir Charles Grenville evinced signs of annoyance which seemed to me excessive."

"By excessive, Colonel Gethryn, what do you mean exactly?"

"Excessive. Meaning overstrong; to an unusually high degree; out of proportion."

"Yes, yes. You mean to say, Colonel Gethryn, that you consider Sir Charles's reception of the remarks about the rifle club to exhibit more annoyance than such a subject would reasonably cause?"

"That is what I mean. I'm afraid I haven't your facility."

"I see. Now, Colonel Gethryn, could you please tell the court of the subsequent occasion upon which you noted anything unusual in Sir Charles's or anyone else's behaviour at this luncheon party?"

"I was going to, you know. The next occasion, and I think the only other that I can use, followed so close upon the first that perhaps it is part and parcel of the same thing. That is for you to decide. It was when, Lady Grenville having stated that her husband disliked the rifle club because he had been persuaded to subscribe money to it, one of my fellow-guests in a chivalrous endeavour to change the subject took up the name that Lady Grenville had mentioned as the extractor of money. The sound of this name produced the second awkwardness. Sir Charles plainly did not like it. Sir Charles took no pains whatsoever to disguise this from his guests. Somebody changed the subject at last, and peace was restored."

"One moment, Colonel. What was this name which you say produced this effect upon Sir Charles?"

"Belton."

The silence in the court was now so intense that it was louder than most noises.

"Belton?" said the coroner. "Belton? Belton? Colonel Gethryn, do you know anything of this Belton?"

"Yes. I have met Mr. Belton. Recently. He is, I understand, a Canadian. He is a man of means. He is in the habit of spending his summers in England, and for the past three or four years—I think it is three actually—he has taken for the summer months the White House in Upper Samsford. I gathered from the conversation that Mr. Belton was an enthusiastic member, if not the founder, of the Rook Rifle Club, and that he had been worrying Sir Charles for excessive donations. By excessive I mean rather out of proportion, if you follow me. Unduly high."

"I see. But I gather, Colonel Gethryn, that you mean to suggest that Sir Charles's—shall we say, annoyance—was——"

"Excessive. Exactly. In fact, I gathered that it was something other than the rifle club which caused his exhibition of ill-temper."

"Are you aware, Colonel Gethryn, that—as those of us who have been fortunate enough to be present at these proceedings since the beginning have heard—that it was not an unusual matter for Sir Charles Grenville to be in ill-temper?"

"Yes."

"You were, then, perhaps, well acquainted with Sir Charles Grenville?"

"The first and last time upon which I saw Sir Charles Grenville was at the luncheon party of which we were speaking a moment ago."

"Really? How then is it that you answered my last question in the affirmative?"

"Simply because—and I can't think that it is any matter for self-congratulation—I know a bad-tempered man when I see one. What I am trying to tell the court is that

even taking this natural ill-temper into consideration, the exhibition of it upon the occasions of which I have spoken was—I'm sorry, there's only one word for it—excessive."

"I see. Now, Colonel Gethryn, I believe that you have some reputation in connection with police work of one sort and another?"

"Really?"

Still silence which was not just silence but a sort of aching lack of noise. This, thought the public, was the stuff to give 'em. Reading, in future, would have nothing over Farningham. The coroner waited, the court waited, Gethryn waited. Gethryn won. The coroner said:

"In that case, Colonel Gethryn, perhaps you can tell us whether you have formed any opinion in regard to this case?"

The little man blotted his copy-book there. He was so plainly carried away by a desire to get the better of this duel with the celebrated Colonel Gethryn that he showed it. Fatal mistake. He repeated his last question in a slightly varied form:

"Have you, Colonel Gethryn, formed any opinion of your own in regard to this case?"

"Oh, yes."

"Really? That is most interesting. Perhaps the court might have the benefit—if of course your theories are germane to their business—of hearing what these theories of yours may be."

"Certainly. I have formed the opinion—quite idly of course, for the whole matter is nothing to do with me—that Sir Charles Grenville was murdered as the result of a long and intricate intrigue——"

"Do you suggest, Colonel Gethryn, that this is a case of 'Cherchez la femme'?"

"My dear sir, if you will when you get home look up

the word in the dictionary you will find that the answer is something like this: Noun; underhand plotting or plot—first meaning; secondary meaning—a secret liaison or amour. It was the primary meaning with which I was concerned, and I used the adjectives 'long and intricate.'"

"May I ask, Colonel Gethryn, whether you are endeavouring to make mock of this court?"

"Yes. I mean, you may ask. The answer is no. I am merely doing as my imagination tells me I am being done by."

Another silence; now, for the second time, the coroner took a sip of that very dusty-looking water. It seemed to do him good. When he resumed it was in a milder tone. He said:

"Perhaps at this stage, Colonel Gethryn, it would be best if I asked you to tell the court in your own words exactly how you came to form this theory and why, and also what this theory is. I will ask you to be as brief as possible."

"I think perhaps it would be best if I answered those three questions upside-down. In other words, tell you what my theory is before I tell you how and why I formed it. My theory is that Sir Charles Grenville was not killed where he was found lying . . ."

I think that Gethryn had got another sentence—perhaps more—out before the storm broke. But whatever his words were after that first remark I don't suppose anybody, except himself, will ever know. Babel. Babel for a minute which seemed much longer; unrestrained. . . . And then rappings with the gavel. . . . More rappings. . . . Then a thunderous tattoo. . . . Gradually quietening. . . . Silence again. . . . Expectant tiptoe ear-reaching silence. . . . The coroner began:

"May I ask you to repeat, Colonel Gethryn——"

"Certainly. I stated that the theory which I formed and which you ask me to put before the court was that Sir Charles Grenville was not killed where he was found. That, in other words, his dead body was placed at the foot of the steps where it was found some time after life had ceased. Corollary: that the placing of the body in this position was part of a plot to mislead the Law."

"Good gracious me! Astounding statement! I suppose, Colonel Gethryn, there is no possibility that you are endeavouring to use this court as a medium for humour?"

"That would be impossible."

"You seriously, then, mean to assert to this court that your considered opinion—the opinion of one not without experience in matters of this kind—your considered opinion is that the actual murder of Sir Charles Grenville took place at some spot other than that on which his body was found by the witness George Welby?"

"Exactly."

"May I ask, Colonel Gethryn—this is all highly irregular, but I suppose I have no other course but to follow up your remarks—may I ask whether you have any factual basis for your astonishing theory?"

"Certainly I have. I was, upon the morning following the crime, invited by the police, owing to circumstances into which it is not necessary to enquire, to examine the body. I did so. I found, apart from everything else, that there were, upon the back of the coat between the shoulder blades and just under the rim of the turned-down collar of the coat, grains of silver sand. This struck me as unusual. It is perfectly obvious, even to one who has no more than a rudimentary geological smattering, that this neighbourhood contains no original silver sand, so that this silver sand could not have come to be upon a coat merely by the body's association with the ground. By following

up my interest in this little phenomenon I found that silver sand was not in use or being in, about, or near Samsford Hall; that, also, silver sand was not publicly in use or being at any of the houses, large or small, in or around Samsford and Upper Samsford. It then became necessary, for my own peace of mind, to ascertain how and why it was that silver sand, which had no belonging in the neighbourhood, should come upon a dead man's coat. I found several answers. I will only bother you with one—that which I consider correct. This silver sand came from a sand-bag."

"A sand-bag?"

"By sand-bag I mean a small bag or sack or other limp receptacle which, filled with sand—in this case silver sand—can be used as a weapon. The use of a sand-bag upon a man whose death was caused, apparently at least, by a bullet makes it extremely probable, if you examine the problem properly, that the man was stunned before he was shot. A great many reasons could be hitched onto this seemingly unnecessarily violent procedure but the only satisfactory one is this: that, it being necessary to the scheme that the man to be murdered should be shot in a particular way, and from a particular angle, the safest, quickest, and shortest method of getting him into the necessary position was to render him unconscious before the shot was fired. Following up this deduction I made a search of various likely places within a short radius of the spot where the body was found, and in the third place I discovered further traces of silver sand. What had happened, obviously, is this: that the bag—either an old one or a hastily improvised new one—had broken at the moment of impact and that some of the contents had spilled out onto the coat of the dead man and some onto the ground where the sand-bagging was carried out. I have no

doubt that if a properly experienced and specialized doctor were to be called, he would find traces of the blow with the bag. It is, I think, common knowledge that the more obvious traces such as the bruises, contusions, and swellings of an ordinary blow are not left by a sand-bag. The idea, however, that a sand-bag can be used without any trace whatsoever being left upon the victim is nonsense."

"Colonel Gethryn, this is amazing! At the moment I must say that I am divided in my mind as to how to treat your evidence. When I called you I expected merely to obtain your evidence in regard to the luncheon party, and now you come out with this—if I may say so—far-fetched seeming theory of your own. However, since you have made the statement I suppose I must let you complete it. I assume that you have more to tell the court. Will you please do so, in your own words, being as brief as possible?"

"Certainly. At this stage this court and the police and the other components of Law should sit down at their various tables with their several heads in their hands and think until they arrive at this conclusion: there is silver sand found upon the dead man's coat. There is no silver sand naturally in the district. There is no silver sand publicly in use in the district. The only other point at which silver sand is found in the neighbourhood of where the body was discovered is a spot eminently suitable for ill-doing—a spot which it is most unlikely that any save one exceptionally well versed in the woodland part of Samsford Park would know of. Assumption: that Grenville was sand-bagged in this spot and was subsequently shot at or near this spot, was hidden there for a time, and was moved to the foot of the steps opposite The Moon inn at some time between 8:50—when witnesses passing over the steps swear that there was no body there—and

9:50 when the body was found there by George Welby. This assuming, of course, that Welby is telling the truth. I think—and I'm sure that anyone who has seen him will agree—that Welby is not of a sufficiently imaginative mind to tell anything else. . . . I would now direct the attention of the court to the fact that, if this were the sequence of events, then the supposition that the shot which killed Grenville was fired either from The Moon inn or behind it is ridiculous."

Storm, audibly brewing for some moments now, broke again. The gavel was useless. A sledgehammer smashing the table to pieces would have been useless. They had to talk, and they talked. A more hideous row it is impossible to imagine. It made me realize that if only enough human beings could be herded together in a long cage, the Zoo would have spots knocked off it.

The coroner had angry red patches on his pasty cheeks. Gethryn looked at him. He glared at Gethryn. He said:

"I must ask you, Colonel, not to waste the time of the court with this theorizing, ingenious though it may possibly be. Have you anything more concrete to say before I ask you to stand down?"

Gethryn shifted a little in his chair. The fingers of his right hand went to a waistcoat pocket and came away holding some small object. He said:

"There's an exhibit here." He leaned over and with a smile handed it to the nearest juryman. It travelled swiftly to the coroner.

"That," said Gethryn, "is a bullet. A bullet from a small-bore rifle. I extracted it, in the presence of a reliable witness, from a certain beech tree in Samsford Park. This beech tree was in a line with and approximately twenty-five yards to the northwestern or park wall side of the spot where I found the silver sand. The spot, that is, where

I said that Grenville was shot. Before I found the bullet I'd worked out the thing like this: The necessity for laying Grenville out before shooting him was, as we have said before, most probably because, to fit in with the murderer's plans, this shot must be in a certain place on his body and fired from a particular angle. I knew from examination of the body what this place and angle would be, and I therefore searched in the dell where I found the sand for the most probable position for the human target. This was an easy one. On the southern side of the clearing there are two saplings growing just far enough apart for a man's body, jammed between them, to be supported upright. The shot of course might have been fired from the necessary distance, certainly not less than twenty-five yards, from either side—north or south—of this corpse-rack according to which way the jammed man was faced. That made the job longer, but I was lucky. In two hours I had found the tree which the bullet had entered. It will, of course, be said that because I found a bullet in a tree in Samsford Park it is not necessarily the bullet which killed Sir Charles Grenville. Very true. But consider: The shooting done in Samsford Park, either by poachers or keepers or others, would not be—and in fact is not—done with rook rifles. Consider further: The silver sand is extraordinary; the bullet in the tree is extraordinary. The two extraordinarinesses dovetail and the possible deduction from them, though not proof, is more than halfway towards it. I think that's all I have to say at the moment."

And then, what I suppose the babblers didn't see in their eagerness to add each his own quota to the babel, the appearance of a uniformed, hatless police inspector at the coroner's side, the passing of a note, the reading of this note by the coroner. The tossing, impatient and angry and yet resigned, of the coroner's head. . . .

Gradually, as if the voices were the waves of a quickly receding tide, silence again. . . . The coroner, with quick fingers, tore the note into shreds. He said:

"At the request of the police this court is now adjourned. Notice of its re-meeting will be sent to all concerned in due course."

## CHAPTER NINE

I WAS stepping into the car outside the Shire Hall when an urchin touched me on the arm.

"Name o' Lawless?" he said.

My head was in such a swirl that I had to think for a minute. I nodded. He pushed a note into my hand. "Gent said to wait for an answer." I tore the thing open.

DEAR L:

Can you be at home 5:30 to 6:30 this evening? Important.

A. R. G.

At the bottom I scribbled: "Yes."

The lad ran off without waiting for a tip.

(2)

I believe I did some work that day. My day-book certainly shows that I visited four cases. None of them died, so I assume that my state of mind was at least not dangerous to animals. I got back to Little Thatches at a quarter-past five. I refused Mrs. Yule's tea and had a drink. I went upstairs and had a cold bath and changed. When I came down again I was fresher in body but still my mind was more like an omelette than anything else. All I could do was to wait.

He came at twenty to six. I heard the roar of the Voisin and was out of the gate before he had pulled up. I took him in and sat him down. I noticed as I gave him his drink that the man looked tired. Very tired. He took half the

tumblerful in one gulp. He set the glass down by his side. I tried to keep quiet but couldn't. The words burst out of me. I said:

"Who is it? *Can't* be Belton."

"Cock Robin, d'you mean? That's what I've come to talk about. By the way, looked out of your windows lately?"

I stared. He hoisted his six-foot-one out of the chair. "Mind if we go upstairs?"

This was all too much for me. I followed like a very fluffy lamb. He opened the bathroom door and went in, beckoning me to follow. I followed. He pulled aside the chintz curtain and peered out round its edge. He turned, still holding the thing back.

"Dekko," he said.

I dekkoed. The bathroom is in front of the house immediately over the porch. He was looking up to the right, that is, up the hill. I looked that way too. Just at the bend, on the grass bank leading up to the park wall, sat a man. Beside him, asprawl on the grass with that ridiculously helpless look which the machine always has when not upright, was a bicycle.

"Seen him before?" said Gethryn.

I shook my head.

"Know what it is?"

I shook my head and turned away from the window. I was a bit tired of all this, but immediately I had turned away came the reaction to that last remark. I turned back and had another look, long and earnest.

"Good Lord!" I said. "Plainclothes?"

He nodded. He sat down on the edge of the bath and lit a cigarette. He said:

"'Fraid you'll have to get used to that for twenty-four hours or so, anyhow. It's my fault really."

"Yours?"

"Look at it like this: There's the police all nice and tight with a nice little prisoner in a cell, and then some great fathead comes along and drills holes all over what they'd thought was a cast-iron case. What are they going to do? Answer: They're going to stop the inquest, which they did, and look round desperately to see if there's anybody else. Who's the first one—the only other suspicious character their single-track minds had happened to run across? Answer: Mr. Michael Lawless. I'm sorry, but it couldn't be helped."

I sat down too on the edge of the basin. I stared. I said at last:

"Good Lord! D'you mean to say they're going to shove me inside?"

He shook his head. "Don't think they'll get to that. We ought to stop 'em before that's due. No, what I mean is that unless you're very careful and slippy—you mustn't be slippy obviously—you'll have that very plain policeman attached to you wherever you go for at least a day and a night. . . . Let's go down again, shall we? This bath's cold."

We went down again. I poured myself out another drink. I needed it.

"Now," I said, "suppose you tell me what you really came for?"

He smiled, but only for a second. After that smile his face seemed very grave. Before he began speaking I had a nasty sinking, clutching sensation at the pit of my stomach. I *can't* have known what he was going to say and yet I believe I did. He said:

"Bit of bad news for you. Temporary bad news, anyhow. . . . All right, man, don't look like that! Without thrashing the shrubbery I'll tell you at once that besides

you the police are now extremely interested in Lady Grenville. . . ."

I hope the suddenness with which I sat down in a chair didn't show itself for what it was—inability to keep standing. It was very lucky that chair was there. Pure good fortune. In the back of my head there started ringing a phrase which I thought I'd driven away for ever. A phrase of three words; Sheila's voice saying: "I'll kill you" . . .

I took hold of myself. Gethryn was still speaking:

". . . I'm afraid it's you, you know. They lose Dinwater —or lose half the Nelson they've got on him, so immediately they switch onto Mr. Lawless. They then think like this: If this swine Gethryn *should* be right, that job was not a one-man job. If Dinwater was nothing to do with it at all, then our only other suspect is Lawless. Lawless—I'm sorry, man, but I've told you before that it's known—is in love with Lady Grenville. Let's suppose that Lady Grenville is in love with Lawless. We know that Lady Grenville and Sir Charles Grenville didn't get on. Suppose that Lady Grenville and Lawless got together, saying to each other: We must get rid of Charles, but we must get rid of Charles in such a way that we are never suspected. We will therefore get rid of Charles and make it look as if somebody else had got rid of him——"

"My God!" Feeling was coming back to my body again. I sat upright again. "My God! As far as I'm concerned it's a cinch. I can't prove what I was doing that night, not for the important times, anyhow." I lay back in the chair and thought. Relief came over me in a wave. I said:

"Thank the Lord, Sheila's all right that way——" I broke off and stared. I blinked my eyes and stared again. I was right—Gethryn was shaking his head.

"She's not," he said quietly. "That's the trouble. It

appears that she behaved in much the same way as you that evening. That's to say, she went for one of those so likely and so very awkward walks upon which one sees nobody and nobody sees one. Your walk was even more awkward, for somebody did see you. A man saw you, just when he shouldn't have seen you, when you were cleaning your rifle for lack of anything better to do. No one, at least so far, has been found who saw Lady Grenville. No one at all. Of course the bobbies aren't very far on at present. They've only had the afternoon in which to work, but as far as they've got I must say it's not nice."

I had to wet my lips three or four times with my tongue before I could get anything out. I said at last:

"What does she say?"

He shrugged. "Couldn't stand the house, went out just after her husband. Didn't see him, didn't see anybody. Was seen by about four servants going out at 6:45 approximately. Was seen by servants coming in just before eight—just in time to change for dinner. Nobody else has been found who saw her while she was out. States that she walked over to the Finchhampstead corner of the park and then back by the longer route. This would take the time she was out, but there's no corroboration of it at all. Not yet, anyhow."

I jumped out of the chair. I couldn't sit still any longer. I began to walk about my little room. I stopped in front of him at last. I believe I did something silly like pointing a dramatic finger at him—it's extraordinary what silly things one will do in moments like these, things which when one sees them on the stage one sneers at. I said —I had to keep my teeth shut and speak through them; it seemed the only way I could get anything out— I said:

"Look here, man! You've done this! What are you going

to do? You've said you know I'm speaking the truth. D'you believe her? Answer now! Answer, blast you!"

He looked up at me, but didn't smile. He said slowly: "Of course. I once said—to someone whom I'm very fond of—that I was a prejudiced detective. I still am. In my opinion that's the only way to get to the bottom of anything. Nothing like a good healthy bias in one way or another. Gives you a strong base for thinking. *And* it's good sense. I've only met Lady Grenville once but that was quite enough. She certainly might kill someone, but equally certainly, if she did kill someone, she wouldn't try and plant the hanging on an innocent man."

I suppressed—and I can assure you with the greatest difficulty—a desire to ask him to shake hands. I sat down again. I repeated my question of a moment before:

"What are you going to do?" I said.

"There's only one thing to do; that's what I've started doing. It's been awkward for you, perhaps, but it can't be helped. When they've got the wrong man the right thing to do is to switch 'em off him and put them onto the right one. Unfortunately what they've done now is to switch off one wrong one onto two others. Problem before the house: Find the right one and give him to them on a plate with a nice display of watercress round him."

I interrupted. "Who is it? In the name of God, who is it?"

He looked at me. "I could bear to know," he said, "whether Mr. Belton has any friends, preferably male, about this part of the world. Close friends, I mean. Perhaps confidential servants would do."

I stared at him.

"*Belton!* Then you *do* think Belton——"

"My dear fellow, don't let's think at all. A great mistake."

He cocked one eyebrow at me and waited for the answer to his question. I tried to supply it but I'm afraid I wasn't very much use to him. I didn't know much of Belton. All I did know rather tended to show that most of his friends were women. Certainly except for the Hall, the only two houses he visited to my knowledge regularly were Mother Willington's and Farninghambury, which belonged to old Lady Freeland-Scott who had two weather-beaten hunting daughters and no male connections whatsoever. I'd only once been in his house; a couple of summers before when a wirehaired terrier he used to have had been so bad with hysteria that I'd had to recommend putting it away. I'd certainly seen then a male servant but it was difficult to remember what he looked like. I believed there were also a cook and a maid or two.

"Any chauffeur?" said Gethryn.

"If there is, he's got a sinecure. Driving a car's Belton's one amusement except shooting, which he does extraordinarily badly. I must say he *can* drive. That Maxa of his—have you seen it?"

Gethryn sat up. "That's Belton's, is it? Open two-seater, blue, very fast?"

I nodded.

"Well, well!" He sat back again and crossed his legs. "You were saying?"

"If there is a chauffeur, he's onto a very soft job. I've never seen anyone else but Belton drive that car. . . . No, there can't be a chauffeur."

"Gardener?"

"I can tell you about that now. The garden's looked after by the owner's gardener, an old fellow called Farrow; lives in one of those cottages at the bottom here; ninety-eight last birthday; no teeth; deaf as a post, and brain like a kohl-rabi."

Silence. After it he said:

"Belton likely to be in at this time? Any idea?"

I shrugged. "None whatsoever."

He went back to the Maxa. "Tell me, does Belton always rig himself out like that—white dust-coat, check cap, racing goggles?"

I nodded. "Always. Don't like the cap and coat, but must say I'd want goggles myself if I went at that rate. I wonder you don't."

He got up suddenly. He said:

"I'm going out. Going to pay a call. You stay where you are. Back in ten minutes."

I stayed where I was. He was back in nine. It seemed less than that to me from the time when I heard the car whine away from the door to the time when I heard the screech of its brakes as it returned. He'd left the front door open and now walked straight in. He went back to his chair and sat in it. I blinked. For a moment I wondered whether I'd been dreaming and he'd been sitting there all the time. He said:

"That's that! Description of Mr. Belton's man-servant: Nationality, American. Height, five foot ten. Build, slim. Eyes, gooseberry. Complexion, very blond. Manners, nil. Well, well. He'd do, you know."

I was beginning to know Gethryn. I kept quiet. When he talks like that I really think he's doing it more to himself than to other people. It's no good asking him what he means because even if you do, it never comes out any quicker. I did ask him once and he said: "I don't know what I mean myself. Let's think."

More silence. He looked toward the corner where my telephone is. He said:

"Mind if I use that?"

"Not a bit."

He went to it and picked it up and asked for a Samsford number which I knew was Aviss's. I sat up.

"Hullo. . . . Is that Samsford 41? . . . Is Mr. Aviss in, please? . . . Mr. Anthony Gethryn. . . . Thank you. . . . That you, Mr. Aviss? . . . I think I saw you at the inquest this morning, so you'll perhaps realize that the hint you gave me the other night hasn't been altogether ignored. Pardon? . . . No, I don't think so. No. . . . Well, if you insist, I had thought before that . . . No. . . . No. . . . I want to ask you something else. . . . You know that annoying affair of yours with Belton the other night? I'm told, unofficially, that Belton times this accident as having taken place at approximately five to eight. I just wondered whether you agreed. . . ."

The instrument began to cackle so loudly that every now and then I could catch the words of Aviss at the other end, even from where I sat. I knew exactly what he was saying. He was saying that he did agree but that it hurt him like a barrel of snakes to have to do so. That, Colonel, this was the first time he'd ever been forced to see eye to eye with the fine old Canadian gentleman, but there it was. All this and a lot more. I could see from where I sat the corner of Gethryn's mouth twisting into one of his smiles. He stuck it like a Briton.

The tirade went on—it seemed to me for minutes—but at last it ceased and Gethryn was once more in his chair. He crossed his legs, laced his hands behind his head, and closed his eyes. I went on saying nothing. I don't know how long we sat there like that, perhaps five minutes, perhaps a quarter of an hour, but I know there came a point when I couldn't stand it any longer. I said:

"Look here! Sorry to interrupt and all that, but you asked me to be here to-night to meet you. It was important, you said, and here you've been and here you are, and I'm

no forrader and I must say I'd like to be. It might help me from going off my onion. All I can gather is that while you may not actually suspect Belton himself, you think he's got a great deal to do with this business."

He didn't open his eyes, but he said:

"Your gatherings are right. I'm worried about this business of Mr. Belton, you know. He fits and he doesn't fit. There's too much of him and not enough of him. Sometimes he's the answer—that's when it doesn't matter whether he is or not—and sometimes he's not the answer, when it would be perfectly lovely if he were."

He uncrossed his legs and sat up.

"Only one thing for it, Lawless—we'll call upon Mr. Belton."

"When?

He looked at his watch. "At 6:25 p.m. to-day—two and a half minutes from now. His man said he'd be back at 6:15 for certain. Come on!"

I came on. In the hall I said:

"What about my shadow?"

He grinned. "We'll give him some exercise."

As I settled myself into the low front seat of the car, I half turned and saw out of the tail of my eye that my friend was raising his bicycle. What hope he thought he had I can't imagine, but Duty, I suppose, is Duty. Gethryn switched on. The engine began to tick. With the hand farthest away from him concealed beneath my leg I hung onto the seat. A blast of wind; three million, five hundred and forty-nine thousand, six hundred and seventy-three gnats smashed to death against my face; Belton's gate. The car swung slowly into the drive, made the elliptic sweep, and came demurely to rest by the front door. We got out. Gethryn rang. This time a maid answered the door. Yes, Mr. Belton was in. . . . What names please? . . .

If we would wait a moment she would see whether Mr. Belton could see us.

She came back. Mr. Belton could. We followed her across the hall, down a cool oak-floored passage and into a pleasant room, half study, half gunroom, at the back of the house. Belton was standing in the middle of the floor and came forward with outstretched hand. We went through the ceremony. He put us into chairs, gave us cigars, and offered drinks. Gethryn refused. Rather reluctantly after my drive, I followed his lead.

Belton began pleasant conversational remarks about the weather and the country, which were cut short. Gethryn said:

"Mr. Belton, I would like to get the business upon which I've come over as quickly as possible. I hope you'll forgive the incivility."

Belton smiled his charming smile. "Why, certainly," he said. He was looking at Gethryn and I could therefore stare at him with impunity. The smile was quite steady on his lips but it seemed to me that it wasn't touching his eyes. They were cold and hard and very watchful.

"I don't know," Gethryn was saying, "whether you happen to have heard of what took place at the inquest on Sir Charles Grenville this morning."

Belton shrugged. "A little. Matter of fact, sir, I had a cop—policeman, I should say—call on me this afternoon. . . ." He seemed about to say more, but then to change his mind.

Gethryn raised his eyebrows. "Really? Now, that's odd. I wonder whether I'm here on the same errand?"

Belton shook his head. "I guess not, Colonel Gethryn, I guess not." The smile had gone now, and quite naturally, if you come to think about it. Gethryn said:

"No, probably not. I'll get on with my business now.

You probably don't know—I'm sure there's no reason why you should—that I'm interested in the death of Sir Charles Grenville from the point of view of Dinwater. It's my opinion, Mr. Belton, that in Dinwater the police have got hold of the wrong man. Entirely the wrong man. I said as much this morning at the inquest; what effect the exposition of my theory may have had of course I can't tell. What I've come to see you about is this——" He paused and got up. He seemed taller even than usual. There was a small table beside him and on this he laid down Belton's cigar which he had held unlighted in his fingers. He said:

"I want you to tell me how you spent the time between 6:45 and 10 p.m. on Friday last."

He stood with his hands in his pockets and looked at Belton across Belton's carpet.

The smile came back to Belton's mouth but it wasn't a smile I'd ever seen there before. It was a smile which seemed to me, watching this little scene like a man in the front row of the stalls, most clearly at odds with the present appearance of Mr. Guy Belton and even more queerly at odds with my previous conception of Mr. Guy Belton. There was no charm about that smile and no foppery. It was some time before he replied. The tall airy room was absolutely silent until he spoke. He said:

"Ever had it put to you, Colonel, that you've got a very considerable nerve?"

Gethryn nodded. "Frequently."

Belton eyed him. "Yes, I'll say you have," he said slowly. He gave a sudden jerking shrug, swung round on his heel, and walked over to a little Sheraton writing table in the corner by the bay window. He opened a drawer and from the drawer took a single sheet of paper. With this fluttering in his fingers he came back to Gethryn. He said:

"Gall brings its own reward, Colonel. If you've got a pencil or a style pen, I'll loan you a bit of paper and you can copy this down. It's the statement which, at the request of the cop—policeman—who called here this afternoon, I made out. It fully answers the question you had the chilled-steel neck to ask me just now."

Gethryn took the sheet of paper held out to him. "Thanks," he said. His voice was entirely without emotion. He crossed to the writing table, sat down, and began to copy into a notebook what was on the paper.

Belton watched him for a moment, then swung round and came over to me. He stood looking down at me. He said:

"Say, Lawless, what're you in this film? Doctor Watson or Pedro the Bloodhound? If you'll let me say so, you don't look cut out for either part."

I'd have liked—very much I'd have liked—to stop sitting and see what I could do with Mr. Belton. But in the circumstances I couldn't, and thank the Lord I had enough sense left to realize this. I had to be content with smiling rather a sickly smile and keeping mum. I wondered furiously behind that awful contortion of my face why on earth Gethryn had brought me up here. Witness, I suppose.

Belton opened his mouth again, but before he could speak there was a little stir as Gethryn pushed back his chair, rose, and came toward us. He folded up the paper which Belton had given to him, and handed it back.

"Thanks," he said.

"That all you want?" Belton was smiling again; another smile, this time definitely an offensive one. "Nothing else you want?" he repeated. "Like to take my toe-prints, or measure the shape of my skull, or anything like that? Any little thing, only too anxious to be of use."

Gethryn, I was astonished to see, was looking ashamed of himself. Perhaps he had cause, but that didn't lessen my astonishment. Before I'd seen that look on his face and heard the controlled but rather shamefaced stammering of his half-apology, I would never have believed that any circumstance, however uncomfortable, would have made this man like that.

We got out as quickly as we decently could, which I might tell you was very quick. Belton himself took us to the door. I think he was enjoying the situation. He was ironically courteous and altogether unpleasing. He stood and watched us as we got into the car. I didn't look at him but I could feel his eyes on my back. The engine started; the car bore slowly round the sweep of the drive and out. I braced myself for that terrific swoop down through the village and back up the hill—but it didn't come. I thought I knew why. I didn't look and the driver and I didn't talk. I remembered many an occasion when *I'd* had to feel small in front of other men. It's not a nice feeling and one doesn't want to be looked at. But presently, just in fact as we were passing The Moon itself, I heard a little sound from beside me which made me look.

The companion I'd thought abashed was wearing a broader smile than any I'd yet seen on his face. My ears had been quite right. It *was* a chuckle I'd heard. I said:

"Well! What the devil——"

"Wait until we're inside," he said. He pulled up outside my house and we went in again. Before I entered the front door I had a glance round to see whether my shadow was back at his post. He was. It's rather doubtful whether he'd ever left it. Probably one look at the spare wheel on the back of the Voisin had been too much for him.

Once more we were back in the chairs that we had twice left already in this extraordinary evening.

"Now!" I said, and waited.

"Belton, you mean? Well, I thought we all did our little bits quite nicely. Belton did the only thing he could do. You were tidily seen and not heard. I was awfully upset. I don't know, but I *think* he really thought I was . . . Now let's look at this." He took the notebook from his pocket. "Come and look here."

I went and looked there. I saw:

BELTON. Friday 18th Aug.

6:45 Petrol fill-up at Samsford Garage.
7:00 Oil fill at Rickett's Garage, Weldock. (12 miles from Samsford.)
7:15 Spoke to Mrs. Willington in front of her house from the car.
7:30 Gin-&-gingerbeer at Crosbie Arms, Wynfoldingham–Fielder's Bar Road. (14 miles from above.)
7:35 Engine trouble same road. Asked yokel nearest garage.
7:36–7:50 Tinkering. Cured choked main jet.
7:55 Fielder's Bar–Samsford main road, collision with E. J. Aviss's Cadillac, owing to other driver's carelessness. Case pending.
8:05 Garage at Fielder's Bar for provisional back axle examination. (6 miles from scene of collision.)
8:05–8:30 White Lion and Garage.
8:45 Home again. (13 miles.)
8:45–9:00 Bath and change.
9:05–11:30 Mrs. Willington's.

I considered this in silence, which I was the first to break. I said, after I'd digested the thing:

"That's that, then. Don't suppose he'd have been such a fool as to give that to the police if he couldn't substantiate it."

Gethryn didn't answer that. He asked instead:

"See those mileage figures in brackets after the points? Those are mine. I know this neighbourhood fairly well, but not so well as you. They about right?"

I looked at them. "Yes, almost dead right, I should say. Fielder's Bar to Samsford *might* be another mile or two, but I don't think so."

I went back and sat down again. I tried not to show my dismay. Belton wasn't It after all. I said:

"I'm afraid our Guy was a bad shot."

"Belton, you mean? . . . Oh yes. . . . D'you know, you've said that before this evening. How bad? No inners at fifteen yards? That sort of thing?"

I got what he was after. I couldn't follow his drift but I answered up like a good little boy.

"Worse. I've seen that fellow at thirty yards fire a dozen rounds and not be on his target at all. In fact, there was a hell of a row once when a girl who had been shooting next to him found that she'd got eight bulls in six shots. As there was a sort of competition going on, this led to quite a lot of trouble until some bright mind discovered what must have happened." In spite of my far from humorous state of mind I grinned at the recollection. It really had been funny. It's a funny situation, if you think of it.

But Gethryn didn't smile. He said, speaking round the empty pipe which he'd been sucking for the last five minutes:

"Very funny. Too funny. Too funny because that girl's card was all bulls. . . . Queer! A sense of humour can be one man's salvation and another's damnation. How long has Belton been a member of that club?"

"Ever since the beginning. In fact, he and the Willington were practically the founders. That would be the summer before last."

"Shoot regularly?"

"With very few exceptions, every solid day of his life."

"Never gets any better?"

"No."

"Quite. See what I'm getting at?"

"Vaguely, but I'm not going to say in case I'm wrong. You tell me, if you can tell anything straight."

"I mean, our friend Belton is such a bad shot—too bad a shot. Incredibly a bad shot! Consider the man: young—by the way, was he in the war?"

I thought. I remembered that I could answer that one. I said what I knew, which was that Dinwater had once told me that he knew for a fact that Belton, instead of fighting, had skulked in America during the war years.

"Dinwater, eh?" Gethryn's tone had changed. "Believe him?"

I shrugged. "Don't see why not. That's all I know, anyhow."

"Right. Back to our sheep. Consider the man, I said: Young; healthy; keeps himself in good condition; drives, very well, a racing car at high speed; and yet his eye is so bad, his coördinations so imperfect that he can't, however much he tries, learn to hit haystacks; and lastly—mark this—his undoubted liking for himself is so much in abeyance that he doesn't mind continuing to make himself a damn' fool in front of a lot of women! It's not right, you know, Lawless. It's an untidy sum. You must take a fresh sheet of paper, Doris, and do it again. I say that Mr. Guy Belton is a young man in good condition with perfect eyes, perfect coördinations, a rather odd sense of humour which gets the better of him at times, and a first-class shot, with any sort of gun."

I thought about this. He waited and watched me thinking about this. I said at last:

"I see it, of course, and when I think about what you said about his not minding making a fool of himself in front of women, I almost believe your theory. . . . But I'm not sure, Gethryn. Aren't you trying to *force* Belton?"

He shook his head. "Not a bit. All I'm doing at the moment is to collect oddities. I always do that. And here's an oddity for you. A Canadian who's been in America during the same time as Grenville; a Canadian who, up to the time of Grenville's death, was in constant touch with Grenville; and a Canadian who, right up to the time of Grenville's execution by shooting, persistently advertises himself as incapable of hitting a haystack at three feet. I wonder whether, by any chance, any of Mr. Belton's history ——"

He broke off here. "Use your telephone again?" he asked.

I nodded.

He crossed to the instrument, sat himself down upon the table, and asked for a trunk call—Victoria 4000. I opened my eyes; having read a few books by Mr. Edgar Wallace, I knew that number. I expected that call to come through in about twenty-five minutes. It came through in five, but I hadn't time to be astonished, I was listening too hard. Gethryn was saying:

"May I speak to Mr. Lucas, please? . . . Oh, thanks very much, Braithwaite. Know when he'll be back? . . . Oh, never mind. Put me through to Inspector Pike, if you can. . . . That you, Pike? Gethryn speaking. . . . Very well, thanks. Do something for me. . . . No, only a little information, private, *if* you've got it. Surname Belton, Christian name Guy. Canadian, apparently rich. Summers in England, Samsford, habitually. Age apparently early to middle thirties. Very sleek, very slick. Required, anything anybody knows about him, whatever it is. Thanks very

much. . . . No. . . . No, that's too long. If you did get anything I'd rather you phoned. Ring up this number, Samsford 12, and if I'm not here, give any message to Mr. Lawless—nobody else. Thanks again. . . . You're a good fellow. . . . No, I won't get myself into trouble. Good-bye!"

He stood up, the telephone still in his hands. He was just going to set the receiver back on its hook when I saw him stop and look at it, then lift it to his ear again. He said:

"What's that? Want me? Who are you? . . . Oh, I see. Just a minute."

He turned round and said to me over his shoulder: "Here, Lawless, I think the Exchange wants you." But the Exchange apparently didn't want Mr. Lawless. I heard a cackling and the receiver went back to his ear again.

"What?" he said. "What's that? . . . I can't hear you. . . . Yes, I am. . . . Yes. . . . Curiosity, Exchange, caused the cat a most horrible death. I don't think, Exchange, that Exchange will do Exchange much good if Exchange is so frank about listening in. . . . Eh? . . . Well, I——Just a minute."

He put his hand over the mouthpiece this time. He turned and looked at me. He said:

"Odd thing, Exchange not only listens in like all the others, but says so. Am I Colonel Gethryn? I have been talking to Scotland Yard, haven't I? I'm the great Sexton Gethryn, ain't I? Therefore I must be 'solving' the local murder. I am, ain't I? It's no good my denying it. Exchange is just due to be relieved. Could Exchange possibly come to Mr. Lawless's house and see me?"

I stared. "Never heard anything like it in my life! Have her if you want her."

He spoke to the telephone girl. "Mr. Lawless says that Exchange may come. When will you be here? . . . Yes,

that'll do. Make it less if you can; I've only got ten minutes or so."

He rang off and put the telephone down. We stared at each other. He said:

"How far's the Exchange? Where is the Exchange? Must be near. Well, well! Life's not yet lost all its thrills. I suppose, putting every moment together, that I must have wondered what telephone girls really looked like for about six months of my life. At last I'm going to know."

He looked at me, with that little twisted smile of his which I had begun to know, and which meant that he was thinking even harder than usual.

"There's another oddity for you, Lawless. Damn it! This case is full of 'em! They blossom! Mind if I have another drink? You'd better, too. If her face is anything like her voice, we'll need it. Never heard anything quite like it before. Finsbury basis, then a layer of Threadneedle Street, the whole washed down with draughts of simulation Gladys Cooper."

We waited in silence. I'm afraid I didn't get so much interest from this waiting as he. With every minute life seemed to be becoming more of a nightmare, some of it funny, but most of it black and incomprehensible and somehow beastly.

Then the squeaking of my gate and the sound of short, quick steps on my path. Gethryn got up. "I'll go," he said.

He went. He came back behind the better-looking of the two girls who ran Samsford's small exchange. I'd often seen her about and vaguely known, I suppose, who she was, but I can't say that I'd ever taken stock of her before. I got up. I felt a bit awkward. I didn't quite know the proper procedure. Gethryn smoothed matters down.

He introduced me with a slightly florid courtesy which,

as apparently he must have anticipated, seemed intensely to the lady's liking.

"This," he said, "is Miss Gilchrist. Miss Gilchrist—Mr. Lawless."

"Pleased," said Miss Gilchrist, "to meet you."

She extended a gloved hand which limply squeezed the tips of my rather reluctant fingers.

"Take a chair, Miss Gilchrist." Gethryn wheeled forward his own.

"Thenks," said Miss Gilchrist. She was very much at home. A little too much. If you know what I mean, she was nervous and seeking to hide the nervousness under rather a distressing cloak of ease. I took covert stock of her. She was prettier than I had realized. She was blonde and faintly plump. From beneath a tight hat golden curls escaped over each ear. She had very large, very fine blue eyes, which she used.

"A cigarette, Miss Gilchrist?" Gethryn was impressive with his case and, later, with a light. I realized that it was about time that as at least the nominal host I did something too. I said, I'm afraid not without malice:

"Would you care for a whisky and soda?"

I was disappointed. She said, very brightly:

"I must say a spot would go down nicely."

Gethryn got it. Over her head he winked at me. It was a very handsome spot which reached her hand. She took the glass with an upward assault from the blue eyes. She said:

"Thenks. Excuse my glove."

"Not at all," said Gethryn. ". . . I say, who plays first? You or me? I'm assuming that Mr. Lawless isn't in this game."

She had the grace to flush a little at that, and simper something quite incomprehensible. Gethryn hitched up a chair and sat himself down. He smiled at her. He said:

"Don't you take any notice of me. You finish that drink and begin in your own time."

I think the smile did it. She raised the glass, said: "Well, cheeriho, everybody!" and began at once.

"I suppose you gentlemen will think goodness knows what-all of me for this. I suppose if either of you cut up rusty you could get me the sack. But as you're gentlemen I know you wouldn't be so mean."

She waited there. I shook my head dumbly.

"My *dear* Miss Gilchrist!" said Gethryn. Miss Gilchrist sighed. She seemed much relieved.

"There!" she said, "I knew it would be all right. I told Miss Harrap—that's the girl who runs the Exchange with me—I told her you'd take it like this."

Again Gethryn smiled at her. "Of course we do. What is it?"

Miss Gilchrist crossed one fairly admirable leg over its fellow. She was not ashamed of either. Her voice dropped not exactly to a whisper, but to a confidential undertone.

"It's all this way," she said. "Of course I know, none better—I've had four years' experience; I began when I was sixteen—but I know that us girls aren't supposed to what you might call listen-in. Most girls, though, 'specially in a little, dry old place like this, have got to or they'd go mad. After all, what harm can a girl do, provided she keeps what she knows to herself? That's what I say."

I began to like Miss Gilchrist. She was at least honest. She leaned forward in the big chair and now, quite frankly, gave all her attention to Gethryn. She said:

"I don't want you to think badly of me, Colonel, but I know you're too much of a gentleman to do that. When I say that about listening-in, I don't mean to say that I spend all my time trying to sneak out what people are saying to each other. What I mean is that every now and then

when things have been slow, and perhaps a girl's forgotten to cut out, well, then perhaps I do just go on and hear what people are talking about."

Gethryn was all attention. I lay back and admired him. His attitude, his voice—everything—all were just right. His impressement, which at first I thought was too strong, I saw now was having effect. He urged her on.

"Quite. I understand completely, Miss Gilchrist. By the way, I hope you didn't think that I was at all curt over the telephone just now. Of course, I couldn't know that it wasn't just an ordinary operator. This is getting very interesting. Will you go on?"

Blue eyes met his and slid demurely away and returned. The podgy hand in the over-tight glove pretended to twitch down the over-short skirt.

"As I said to Miss Harrap, Colonel, the minute I read in the Farningham paper a couple of days ago that you were staying with the Lord Lieutenant, I said to Miss Harrap: There! Now they *will* get to the bottom of this myst'ry! And then and there I made up my mind to tell you something I knew but hardly durst tell the police in case I made a pack of trouble for myself."

I began to get interested. I also began to want to pick the girl up, shake her, and tell her to come right out with it. Gethryn was wonderful. He was still all interest. You would have thought that ever since she had begun—was it half an hour ago?—she had been reeling out facts. He said:

"Yes, yes. Please go on. This is most interesting."

She simpered and whatever prettiness her face may have had was washed away. She said:

"Of course, Colonel, I can't make head nor tail of what I'm going to tell you, but it'll be a sight different for you, I dare swear. It's this:" Her voice dropped again, became a hoarse whisper which was much louder than the tone

she had used before. "It's this, Colonel: On Friday afternoon—just about three o'clock it would be because I remember thinking to myself just before it came through, 'Thank heavens it'll soon be time for my cup of tea,'—yes, jest about three o'clock it would be—I had a call through for the Hall. It was the first call I'd had, outgoing or incoming, for nearly an hour. I was reading a lovely book by Berta Ruck and I jest did the necessary on the switchboard and went on reading. I forgot to cut out and if you follow what I mean, I sort of heard someone—not at all a refined voice—saying, 'Only Sir Charles himself'll do.' Jest like that it was, only much more coarse. I'm afraid I can't give you a proper idear of it. And then I heard poor Sir Charles Grenville speaking: 'Who's that?' And then this other, this common man, he said: 'This is Dinwater,' and then began to say something else and Sir Charles cut him off very short. In fact, he used some strong language. By this time I'd stopped reading and I must say I was listening. I expected Sir Charles to ring off any minute, the way he was going on, but he didn't, and the other jest waited for Sir Charles to finish. Then when he'd finished this other said: 'That may be that, but what I want is to see you now. Guffy'—I remember that very well, Colonel, it was such a funny word—'Guffy's on to us proper,' or some words like that. 'Better see me for your own sake,' or words like that. That meaning, anyhow Colonel. And then Sir Charles used some more strong language and said something about someone having left their tennis racquet —— Yes, Colonel, you may look surprised. Somehow that was the first funny thing; talking about tennis racquets to a common man like that didn't seem right somehow. But that isn't all. Sir Charles, he seemed to have quietened down, if you know what I mean, but his voice got very low. It sounded to me, though perhaps I'm fanciful, as though

he wasn't wanting anyone in the house to hear what he was saying. Anyhow, he said: 'I can't see you now,' and the other said, 'No, half-past six would be better. This evening. The old place.' And then Sir Charles said, 'All right,' and rang off."

Miss Gilchrist by this time was right on the edge of her chair. She was leaning toward Gethryn with a conspiratorial frown. Her whisper must have splashed him. She went on with increasing excitement. She was evidently coming to her climax. She said:

"Now, Colonel, here's the extraordinary thing! That man that was speaking to Sir Charles as if he was Dinwater was no more Dinwater than you are! At least, that's what I'll swear. Miss Harrap says I must have been dreaming, and anyhow you wouldn't know a person's voice. But I can tell a person's voice, at least, if you know what I mean, Colonel, there's some people's voices I couldn't make a mistake about, and Dinwater's one of them. He's got a telephone in the public house and he uses it quite a lot. Well, he's got that *reel* Cockney accent, as you know, Colonel. Now this other had a reel Cockney accent too, and at first it didn't strike me that it wasn't Dinwater. And it obviously didn't strike Sir Charles. Later, and especially when I sat down to think about it afterwards, I saw that though this voice had been almost the dead spit of Dinwater's at the beginning, it had sort of changed halfway and wasn't really near so like at the end. Now, Colonel, it would've been funny enough to hear Dinwater speaking to Sir Charles like that, making meetings and all that, and then all this 'Guffy' business. It would've been funny enough if it had been Dinwater. But it wasn't Dinwater, and that I'll swear to, Colonel, on a stack of Bibles as high as this room; and as it wasn't Dinwater, why, that makes it funnier still, doesn't it? See what I mean, Colonel?

Gethryn skilfully turned off the tap. "I do see what you mean, Miss Gilchrist, and I can't tell you how much you've interested me and how much I appreciate what you're doing. What I'd like, if I may, would be to ask you a few questions."

Apparently to be asked a few questions was just what the doctor ordered for Miss Gilchrist. She sat back again in her chair. Once more she had time to think of personal display. She said:

"Only too delighted, I'm sure, Colonel. Please ask me anything you like." A lot of blue eye.

"First," said Gethryn—he had risen and was not standing before the fireplace, looking straight down at Exchange—"first I'd like you to tell me, if you can, where this call came from."

The very red lips of Miss Gilchrist opened in a smile of pleased wideness. "Certainly, Colonel. It came from a call office in Farningham. And it might help you to know, Colonel—it makes it even funnier—you might like to know that Dinwater always does go to Farningham on Friday afternoons, and yet this wasn't Dinwater."

"Miss Gilchrist, is this call office one in a shop, d'you know? Or in a post office? Or anywhere where people are likely to have seen the person who made the call?"

Exchange's golden curls danced with her head-shaking. "No, Colonel. It's one of the street boxes."

"Thank you. Second question, Miss Gilchrist, is a bit more difficult, I'm afraid. Could you give me a little more exactly that part of the conversation which seemed to be about tennis racquets? Was the word 'tennis' ever used, or did you just gather it from hearing 'racquet'?"

A frown came between the blue eyes. The whole face, as its owner concentrated, became less like a picture postcard. She said at last:

"I'm sorry. Suppose I'm a little silly, but I can't remember much of that part, not actual words, I mean. Sir Charles did say, I know, something about someone—perhaps it was this Guffy—'leaving a racquet here.' I wouldn't swear that he said 'tennis' and wouldn't swear that he didn't. I'm awfully sorry, Colonel."

But Gethryn was beaming and I thought I could see genuine pleasure in his face. He said:

"That's all right, Miss Gilchrist. Thanks very much. Now for some more questions. Are you sure about the time?"

Emphatic noddings. "Absolutely sure, Colonel. I wanted my cup of tea and I just looked at the clock and I thought, 'I'll make it in a quarter of an hour,' and I always put the kettle on at 3:15 sharp."

"Thank you. I wish all witnesses had as good memories as you, Miss Gilchrist, and brains. Now, I've nearly finished, I think, but before I do, are you sure about 'Guffy'? That definitely was the sound, was it?"

"Absolutely, Colonel. G-U-F-F-Y. Guffy."

"And now the last one, Miss Gilchrist, which is really two. Are you sure the appointment was 6:30, and are you sure they said 'the old place'?"

"Absolutely, Colonel. See it wet, see it dry."

"Miss Gilchrist, that's splendid. And now I've finished. Lawless, let's offer Miss Gilchrist another drink and another cigarette."

Miss Gilchrist had another drink—"Just the weeniest splash!"—and another cigarette from Gethryn's case. Miss Gilchrist wanted very much, it appeared, to go on talking to the great Colonel Gethryn, and to show even more fully how she combined memory, astuteness, and beauty within her. She was skilfully prevented from showing any more than the last of these attributes. She sat—

God help us all!—for twenty minutes and then Gethryn did get rid of her. I swear that to this day she thinks she ended the party herself, but she didn't. She got up and put on the gloves which she had taken off for her second drink. She was quite silent while she did it. Her head was bent and I imagine she was thinking very hard. She must have been, for when she raised her head she looked at Gethryn and said:

"Colonel, there's one thing. I haven't made any trouble for anybody, have I, through not having told this before?"

She was, quite suddenly, just an ordinary, nice, rather frightened girl. For the second time I liked her.

"Not a bit," said Gethryn, and his tone too had changed. It was his ordinary tone, and it carried conviction.

She smiled, rather a strained little smile. She said:

"And is there any chance, Colonel, that I—that you—that I'm going to get into trouble for this job?"

He smiled at her and shook his head. "Not a chance in the world," he said. "I'll see to that."

She went then. She shook hands all round. Once more she put in heavy work with the blue eyes. This time I didn't mind so much. Gethryn saw her to the gate. I heard them talking for a moment outside and then, as her high heels tapped their way down that last steep bit of hill into the village proper, he was back with me again. I said, looking at my watch:

"Better stay and have some food, hadn't you?"

He nodded. "Please. And can I keep on using the telephone?"

As I went out to find Mrs. Yule and tell her to do her best, I heard the tinkle that comes when you take off the receiver. When I came back into the room he was just finishing the conversation. All I heard was:

". . . good of you not to mind my worrying like this. Thanks."

He put the receiver back on its hook.

"Guffy," he said, "just asking about him or her or it. I shouldn't be a bit cross if anyone told me something about Guffy."

I sat down. I said:

"If new puzzles don't stop cropping up soon, before I know the answer to any of the others, I shall go mad. I mean that, Gethryn. I can't make out whether I'm asleep or awake. Whatever I am I hate it. Couldn't we get some order into this thing? Couldn't we get something that I can put my teeth into?"

He came and stood in front of the hearth, leaning his back against the mantelpiece. He said:

"My dear fellow! You've diagnosed the trouble wrong. What's the matter with you, and me too, is this: We've got too much to bite on, not an insufficiency. Look here, there will now be a statement of the case by Great Detective. It'll probably do him more good than you, but that can't be helped. Right! G. D. loquitur: Sir Charles Grenville, a beer baronet with an undefined American past, is shot. At first sight it appears that he has been shot by Alfred Dinwater, a former servant and present protégé, who shared in that undefined American past. Later, after Carlton Howe, the investigator, has applied his extraordinary methods, it is found that the beer baronet was not, in fact, shot by Dinwater, and also that the original appearance of the crime as having been done by Dinwater was engineered. Part One. Order your next week's copy now to avoid disappointment.

"Part Two—not so easy to illustrate, but let's try. Passing from fact to conjecture, we ask: As Dinwater didn't shoot Sir Charles Grenville, who is likely to have chosen

Dinwater as scapegoat? Was that choice haphazard? Answer: No, this choice was not haphazard. The same scheme for killing Sir Charles could have been planted much more easily upon any suitable member of the rifle club, perhaps not the same day or at the same place, but certainly more easily. Question: Was this choice of Dinwater solely because Dinwater was known to have been recently quarrelling with Sir Charles; to have shared to a much greater extent than the usual servant Sir Charles's life, especially in the States, and therefore to have at least a surface motive for killing Sir Charles? Or was this choice of Dinwater because *in addition* to everything I've just said the real murderer would also like to see Dinwater out of the way? In other words, was Dinwater merely an unfortunate scapegoat or the proposed victim of a second murder by hanging? Answer considered most likely: Dinwater was chosen as a desirable victim for a second murder by hanging."

I stopped him here. I had kept up with him so far and I wasn't going to lose my grip.

"Why that last?" I said.

He looked at me rather sadly, shaking his head.

"I see what it is," he said. "You've missed something. In fact, you've missed the whole lynchpin. What's the H. C. F. in this affair? Come on, now!"

I came on. I was just going to say that I gave it up, when a dim idea fought its way to the front of my mind. I made a wild shot and said:

"Americana. And don't ask me why I say that because I can't give you the answer."

"That doesn't matter, but you ought to know the answer too. The first layer of your Americana is obvious—Dinwater, who has been in America with Grenville, is made to appear as if he'd shot Grenville. The neighbour-

hood is lousy with Americans. Easy. The second layer, and the one that I think you've missed, was revealed by that unpleasant Mr. Marsh and the really quite pleasant Miss Gilchrist."

I stared at that. I shook my head rather hopelessly. "Can't see it, I'm afraid."

Again he looked at me sadly. "You know, Lawless, for an intelligent man you're disappointing. I suppose it's because you've got your own worries in this business. Look here, now! D'you remember Marsh's evidence? Of course you do. Remember all that stuff he talked about hearing a lot of strange words which weren't bad words and which weren't in a foreign language? You do. Now, then! Think of what our blonde friend was telling us just now, especially about tennis racquets."

I thought. I didn't get any forrader and said so. He said:

"My dear fellow! Grenville and Dinwater have been in America. Nobody knows what they were doing there. Grenville and Dinwater are overheard by a game-keeper having a row and talking a lot of stuff which he didn't understand. Two of the expressions used by Dinwater are something to do with 'Jack' or 'Jacko,' and something like 'Blanking fear.' Somebody rings up Grenville, speaking as Dinwater, and makes a remark which, considering that the speaker must have known the status of Dinwater, *can't* have been anything to do with tennis racquets, and yet the word 'racquet' came in, immediately followed by the word 'here,' making blue-eyed Exchange, who hadn't heard the whole of that particular sentence, jump to the conclusion that Grenville was saying something about someone having left a 'racquet here.' That 'racquet here' is the same as Marsh's 'blanking fear.' Marsh couldn't hear properly, being a fair way away. Exchange had the words straight on to her eardrum. America; Jacko; Rac-

quet here.—If you can't tell me now what sort of affairs Grenville and Dinwater, Inc., were engaged in during those years of theirs in the States, I shall have to send you out of the room."

But I was already thinking that what I really needed was a stout hired man, with thick boots, to kick me three times round my paddock. I said:

"Sorry, sorry! I've got it all now. Hi-jacker and Racketeer. I don't know what they are myself except that they're something dirty and vaguely connected with bootlegging. But I've got you all right."

He nodded. "Yes. You know, you ought to have been there before. As a matter of fact, you're wrong in saying that racketeers are connected with bootlegging. They may be, but very rarely. A hi-jacker is one who steals liquor from ordinary bootleggers, more often than not killing them in the process. Racketeers are enterprising folk who extract money from business concerns of any description by threatening strong-arm stuff on that business. Anyway, all that apart, what we've got is this: that the career of Charles Grenville in the States—that's before he came into the title—was definitely criminal or definitely mixed up with criminals of a certain kind. Now we can get back.

"You asked why I held that Dinwater wasn't merely chosen as a convenient scapegoat but was chosen because his death would be at least desirable as well as Grenville's."

I sat up. "I've got you! Whatever Grenville was killed for, it's quite likely, you mean, that it was something in which Dinwater had had a hand as well."

"Right. We now come to Part Three of the G. D.'s analysis, and this is where G. D. begins to show up for the sprucer that he is. He knows that the death of Grenville and the attempt to plant that death at Dinwater's door is most probably the work of someone who is, if not an

American, at least one who has been a temporary American. The answer, of course, is Belton, but just throw an eye over this again."

He twitched out his pocket book, opened it at the page we had been looking at three quarters of an hour before, and held it out to me.

"Anything strike you about it? Generally, I mean?"

I took the book but didn't look at it. I knew what had struck me about it right from the beginning. I said:

"It's a bit too complete, isn't it? I mean, it looks almost as if he'd known he might be suspected——" I broke off, scratching my head. "But if he did all the things—and he wouldn't be such a fool as to say he did if he didn't—then he can't have done the killing. That body, you know, Gethryn, wasn't killed before seven"—I looked at the book for a moment—"and here he's covered from a quarter to seven to practically midnight. . . . So I suppose that this rather suspiciously doubtful alibi is genuine after all—— *Good God!*"

Gethryn grinned down at me. "Yes, my boy? I will now exhibit real god-like powers and tell you what you were going to say. You were going to say—what about Mr. E. J. Aviss? Well, think about him as much as you like, and see where you get to."

"Tell you where I'll get to before I start. If, by any weird miracle, Aviss was the man—I can't believe it, of course; I don't think I should believe it if I saw him hanged as high as Haman—but if he was, then it means that Belton, who's the ideal fellow; that Belton, who was always in Grenville's pocket and therefore can be assumed to have known a lot about him whereas Aviss wasn't even on calling terms—it means that Belton can't have anything to do with it at all. And yet Belton—well, he looks a bit fishy, doesn't he, when we've got as far as you have?"

"Scales all over him," said Gethryn. "Big fins and a hard roe." He was still smiling. The look of tiredness which I had noticed when he first came in seemed to have vanished. He began to walk up and down the room. There was silence for a while. He came to a stop in front of me at last. He said:

"We ve done enough talking and a bit too much thinking. Thinking's dangerous. Stops one from doing anything. Let's have that book a minute."

He held out his hand. I tossed him the little book. He said:

"Samsford Garage. Deal there?"

I nodded.

"Good terms with 'em?"

"Yes."

"Ring 'em up now. Say—er—say—er—say that you lent Mr. Belton a pair of goggles on Friday last, when he was outside your house. He shoved them in his pocket. Now he can't find them. Was he wearing 'em when he filled up on Friday evening?"

I went obediently to the telephone. I thought I detected a note of suppressed excitement in the voice of Exchange. I wondered, in the couple of minutes I had to wait, whether this Exchange—who must have been Miss Harrap—had yet heard anything about her colleague's visit. . . . Then the garage. Luckily, it was the mechanic we all call Frank who answered. A very good fellow and a very good mechanic.

Yes, Frank remembered Mr. Belton coming in quite distinctly. Mr. Belton had asked him the time before he drove off. It was 6:45. No, Mr. Belton hadn't been wearing any goggles. . . .

I shoved the receiver back. Gethryn was beside me. I said:

"God knows what'll happen if that fellow happens to speak to Belton about the goggles I lent him."

He didn't seem to hear me. He said:

"Know Mrs. Willington? . . . You do? Good! Ring her up and tell her the same story. Go on, man! What's it matter if you lose a client? There aren't any in Brixton."

I rang up Mrs. Willington. I must say I didn't like this job but I was now in the state of mind where I was doing just what I was told.

"No, sir; I'm sorry, sir, the mistress is out."

I was just going to say I'd ring later, but I got a nudge which nearly knocked me off the table. I repeated my little tale about the goggles. I told it better this time—I was getting warmed up and I saw the drift. I was quite pleased with myself; I put in some good work, especially when the parlourmaid said, Yes, she remembered Mr. Belton coming past the house on Friday evening. She had been returning from posting a letter when he stopped her and asked her the time. No, Mr. Belton hadn't had any goggles on then, she'd noticed that particularly as generally he did. So he must have lost Mr. Lawless's goggles before he got there.

This was where my bit of good work came in. I'm prepared to bet that the way I did it the girl didn't see anything odd about my asking whether he had got out to speak to Mrs. Willington.

"No, sir, as it happened the mistress was gardening. She was kneeling down behind the hedge and when she heard Mr. Belton she just stood up sudden-like; give 'im quite a shock."

Then I said: "He didn't get out then? I was only thinking if he got out the goggles might have dropped into the road or somewhere in your garden or something."

"No, sir, he didn't have to get out. You see, the mistress

being by the hedge and him having stopped the car close, they could talk to each other as they were."

I was very sorry to have been such a nuisance. I was very grateful to Annie. Only I *was* so worried about my goggles—a favourite pair.

I rang off and turned. I think I rather expected a bouquet. I didn't get one. Gethryn was still looking at the list. He said:

"Crosbie Arms? Fielder's Bar Garage? White Lion, Fielder's Bar? Know any of those?"

I shook my head. "Only very slightly. Not enough to use that yarn again. . . . I say, though! I could do it at Rickett's Garage. That's the second point on your list. They'll think it damn odd but I could work it. I know Rickett himself and one of the men. Suppose there's not much point in that, though?"

But apparently there was. Without a word he picked up the telephone and handed it to me again. I went through my piece. . . .

When I put the receiver down again we stared at each other. He wasn't smiling now. His whole face seemed different, leaner and sharper, and those curious eyes of his seemed alight. He said, so softly that it was almost to himself:

"At a quarter to seven no goggles. At seven, goggles. At seven-fifteen, no goggles."

The door opened and Mrs. Yule came in. As always, when I have visitors, she looked at me and made soundless words which I knew to be an announcement of food.

But I had to eat by myself. I'd have waited for him when he rushed out only I suddenly discovered that I was hungry. Very hungry. Mrs. Yule, almost in tears, went through the process which she calls "keeping things hotted up." The things were kept hotted up for three quarters of an hour, almost to the minute. When he'd left

the house he hadn't told me where he was going, only muttered something about being back. Then I'd heard the whine and roar of the Voisin showing what it could do in the way of acceleration from a standing start.

When I heard that engine again, I was smoking a cigarette by the dining-room window, looking out into the dusk and wondering whether anywhere roaming about was my very own plainclothes policeman.

I went to the door myself as the car pulled up. Gethryn came up my path with long strides. He said as he reached the door:

"If you *have* got any food, I'll bless you!" I led him to it and watched him eat. While he ate, he talked. . . .

We had coffee in the other room. He borrowed paper and pencil from me and wrote for some minutes. He handed me the sheet. He said:

"There's what I've just told you, as a table."

I read:

6:45 Samsford Garage. No goggles. Asks time.
7:00 Weldock. Asks time. Goggles. Smoking pipe.
7:15 Mrs. Willington. Asks time. No goggles. Pipe immaterial.
7:30 Crosbie Arms. Asks time. Removes goggles. Pipe immaterial.
7:55 Smash with Aviss. (Ascertain.)
8:05 Garage, Fielder's Bar. Goggles. Pipe.
8:10–8:20 approx. Drinks at White Lion, Fielder's Bar. Goggles and pipe.
8:45 Home. No point.
8:45–9:00 Bath, etc. No point.
9:05–11:30 Mrs. Willington's.

I read this once and then again. Without a word I got up and went to the telephone. I rang up Aviss, but I'd barely got the number when I felt Gethryn's hand on my shoulder. He held out his hands. I gave him the telephone.

## CHAPTER TEN

Aviss fitted his bulk gingerly into my biggest chair. It was a tight fit, but he managed it safely. In his right hand he held one of his own vast cigars; in his left the whisky and soda I had just given him. He beamed at us.

"Say," he said, "it's real odd that you should've phoned me when you did, Colonel. I was just about to ring Lawless here and ask him where I was likely to be able to get ahold of you. Gentlemen, you know what I suggested the other night about that skunk Belton? Well, I had a letter to-day from an old friend of mine that's over this side on a visit. He came over on the *Carpathia* a coupla days ago—and I'm just naturally going to show you that letter." His face was a curious study. There was on it still the smile of friendship and yet underneath that smile I could see traces of the craggy fierceness aroused by the very thought of Belton. Gethryn was interested and said so. Aviss waved a huge hand.

"After you," he said with a smile which was now without alloy. "After you, Colonel. I may be fat but I'm no fool. At least, so they tell me, and I'm just guessing that it wasn't for the sight of my svelte figure that you boys had me down here to-night."

"Didn't *have* you down," I said. "Quite willing to come up."

He twinkled. "But the mountain came to Mahomet! Well? The mountain wanted a breath of God's green air. I had my nose stuck in a book all afternoon and half the

evening." He switched his gaze off me onto Gethryn. "Now you shoot, Colonel."

The Colonel shot.

"I wanted to get from you, Mr. Aviss, just one small bit of information. When you had that smash with Belton on Friday night, did you speak to him?"

Aviss shook his head, slow and decisive, like an elephant. "I did not. He didn't give me a chance. I told Lawless I didn't. There was me getting off examining my damage and he's about sixty yards up the road, having had, on account of the collision, to turn the way he wasn't going. Does he come up to see what harm he's done? Does he ten hells! He hops out of that car of his, has a look to see what damage has been done to *him*, hops back again, and comes by me like an imitation Golden Arrow. Why d'you ask, Colonel?"

Gethryn shrugged. "Was he wearing those goggles of his?"

Aviss closed his eyes in reflection. He said after a moment:

"Well, not wearing them, but they were pushed up over the top of his cap. Say, Colonel, what're you after? Great jumping snakes!"

He hoisted himself out of his chair in his excitement. He said, staring first at Gethryn and then at me:

"Meaning to tell me that you're wondering whether it *was* Belton in that car? Well, well!" He waited a minute, then grew impatient. Gethryn was busily writing. "Say, Colonel, don't keep us on pins like this! Cough something up!"

Still Gethryn didn't speak, but he finished his writing. He was filling in something on that sheet of paper which showed Belton's description at the various times on that wonderful alibi—the sheet he had made out while we were

having coffee. He finished now and held it out. Aviss snatched it. He read it once standing. He grunted, went back to his chair, squeezed himself back into it again, and read for the second time. I looked at him and then at Gethryn. I didn't say anything. Aviss was first to break the silence. He still held the paper but with his right hand he slapped his great thigh with a sound like a pistol shot. He said:

"Got you, Colonel! Is this right, what you've said on here? Verified it yourself?—but of course you have. You're not the sort that wouldn't. Well, snake me!"

"That," said Gethryn slowly, "is, as regards the times and places only, Mr. Belton's statement as to how he spent Friday evening. The remarks about Mr. Belton's appearance at these various times are mine. And you are right. They've been verified. The one I've just filled in was the last I wanted. Supposing I were to say to you, Mr. Aviss, that I didn't think that Belton was the man who actually ran into you. What'd you say?"

"How'd I react? Well, purify me, Colonel, but I can't say." He got up again. He began to pace restlessly round the room. I had some fear for the few ornaments on my mantelpiece, but he didn't keep up the thunderous pacing very long. He stopped before the fireplace. He thrust his hands into his pockets and stood shaking his head.

"I can't swallow it, Colonel, it's no good. Ingenious, but useless! Looka here, I'll say that I'm the last one to say that that gink wouldn't perpetrate any crime from wholesale slaughter to white slavery, but I just can't swallow this. Too Hollywood, Colonel, too Hollywood! And I'd take my last oath I saw the bozo. As I make what you're at, you're trying to show that while someone in his car and coat and kit was representing him about this countryside,

he just naturally was running his rule over Sir Grenville. That it?"

Gethryn shrugged. "Let's put it like this, Mr. Aviss—that it wouldn't do me any damage to know what he was doing during those times. I do believe that it wasn't Belton in that car at all those places. Look here, that question I asked you on the phone this evening——"

"D'you mean the time of the smash?"

Gethryn nodded. "You *sure* about that? Dead, certain sure?"

"I'm just as sure of that, sir, as I am of my birthplace, age, and weight. I'm just as sure of that as I am that the world's shaped like an aig and that you and me and Mr. Lawless are sitting conversationalizing here. Five minutes to eight it must've been when those two cars hadn't even a layer of air between 'em. I looked at my watch just as soon's I'd examined the damage—that's just after he went blazin' along past me like a cheap-skate Segrave, and my watch said, and it's never wrong, it said three minutes of eight. Allow two minutes for my hopping outa the car and looking and you've got 7:55. I'd kiss the gates of heaven and swear to that any day you like! Even if I hadn't had my watch I could've made out the time. I started outa my home just round seven o'clock to go for a draught of God's fresh air. It was as hot as hell that day, and I'm used to New York heat! I wanted to make a draught for myself and I just naturally tore along as fast as my Cadillac'd take me, and I got into Fielder's Bar and I had a drink there—and worse beer I've never tasted in my life!—at a quarter after seven. That's some travelling, believe me. I was pleased with the car. Maybe it's not a speed that Mister Belton would think fast, but it's fast enough for me. I pottered round in Fielder's Bar—I'll never forget that sausage roll; like a dead hot-dog—and I left there

about a quarter of eight. I know it was a quarter of eight because I'd just figured out to myself that if I took the trip easy going back I'd get home round about 8:15, which would just suit me. Now, I was just about ten minutes outa Fielder's Bar on the homeward run when that—that—anyhow, when Mister Canada Belton ran foul o' me. By God, the more I think of that smash, the more I realize that if my reactions weren't a darn sight quicker than you'd think, there'd 've been two dead residents in Samsford that evening! D'you know, when I got outa that car at the garage—I'd had to take it right there—I realized that my nerves had had a bit of a shake-up. D'you know that walk up from the garage? Even a sixteen-stoner like me can do that in four minutes easy, and it took me that evening over ten! Eight-thirty when I was in that garage; nearly twenty of nine when I was back at the house." He looked round. He seemed to realize that he had wandered off his subject. He said:

"To get back, I'd like to tell you, Colonel, that I'm just naturally sure that it was Belton who ran foul o' my car, and it was the time I said—7:55. That's what I'm going to swear to in court. That's what I know! Now, looka here, Colonel, you revise your thoughts. Because I *know* that was Belton doesn't say that these other goggle-eyed kites was him, does it? I mean, somewhere there may've been a change—I'm going on your theories now. Now, looking at that paper of yours, you'll see that altogether Mr. Belton has possibly——"

Gethryn cut him short. "I've got all that in my head, you know, Mr. Aviss." His smile robbed the words of any sting. "Now, don't you worry yourself about it. This is my job. What I'd like to do now would be to see that letter of yours. Your turn for shooting."

Aviss looked crestfallen. "I'm a fool," he said. "I put

that letter out on my writing table before I started and on my writing table it still is." He heaved himself out of the chair. "If you boys will just hang on I'll be right back with it."

Gethryn too got to his feet. "Don't you worry. Any time will do."

"No, I'll get it right now. Tell you what, come along with me and have a drink with me." He turned to me. "No reflection on your very excellent whisky, Mr. Lawless."

He swept us out of the room on a tide of exuberant hospitality. He went ahead of us down the path and by the time we got to the gate had the engine of his car running.

"Climb in," he said. We climbed in. I followed Gethryn into the back seat. I saw that as Aviss puffed and wheezed with his turning round (the road's a bit narrow for a large car), Gethryn was peering about in the half-dark. I knew what he was looking for, and looked too. Nowhere was there a sign of my shadow. We slid down the hill into Samsford and up again the other side. Aviss swung neatly into his own gate, hooted to scare a black cat which he had dazzled by the headlights, and drew up before the front door. Gethryn and I got out on the near side of the car. Aviss squeezed himself past the wheel and out on to the off side.

We heard a little chinking as he fumbled with his keys and then an oath as they slipped from his fingers and dropped. And then, right atop of the muttered oath there came—it seemed from my right as I stood facing the house—the vicious little *crack* of a light gun. From underneath the car there came a little rattling spurt of gravel. I leaped backward out of the glare of the headlights. Gethryn was already away from the beam.

"Aviss?" I shouted. There was a grunting and from

round the back of the car Aviss appeared. His shirt-front and face were pale ovals in the darkness. He held the shapeless mass in his hand. Gethryn went toward him. I followed. The shapeless something was a hat. Aviss muttered, in a whisper whose trembling I knew to be rage:

"Blister my soul! Look at that! Fine target I was, right in the light."

It came into my hands first. I held it up close to my eyes and peered. It was a soft hat. Through the front of it, at the top of the beginning of the dent, was a neat drilled hole. I turned to pass the thing to Gethryn; I was too amazed to speak, but Gethryn wasn't there. Aviss's whisper said in my ear, his voice shaking so that he seemed to have to bite off his words:

"Where did you make that come from?"

I nodded to my right, that's to say, to the northeast, and to the northeast stood, first, Belton's house and grounds, then Samsford Church and then the park. Again Aviss's whisper:

"That shot, that wasn't a foot over twenty-five yards." There was a grunt of anger in the darkness and then his feet crunched on the gravel as he ran, very lightly considering his bulk, across the drive and up the steps. I heard his key go into the lock, saw the door frame suddenly bathed in light, and he was gone. I stood there like a fool, then pulled myself together, walked over to the car and switched off the lights. I turned about. I peered this way and that. I was looking for Gethryn.

The soft broad stream of light from the house door was cut off suddenly. The door banged. It was Aviss again. He came running down the steps and I jumped to meet him. In his right hand, glittering in the starlight, was a heavy-plated Colt. I said:

"Where are you going?"

I then had to break into a trot to keep up with him as he went down the drive. He was muttering between his teeth. I stuck close to him. He got to the gate, turned sharp left, and began at a surprising pace to run, keeping along the left-hand hedge to Belton's house. We were almost at the gates when I flung out my hand and caught his coat. The wrench nearly pulled me off my feet, but he stopped. I said:

"Easy now! Easy!"

He threw my arm away with a savage swing.

"Easy be damned!" he said. "I'll get that——! Damn him!"

He went on, but he didn't run any more. He had begun to walk on tiptoe. I thought furiously. I didn't quite know what I was going to do but I kept close behind him. And then, just as he was about to turn into Belton's open gate, a tall shape loomed out of the darkness right in his path. Gethryn. I caught up in three long strides. Gethryn was saying, very low:

"Put the thing away, you fool!"

Aviss said, still in his choked whisper:

"You get outa my way!"

There was a quick movement from Gethryn, a sudden wrench, and the glittering gun was in his hands. He said:

"Listen! I've been to the house, just come from it. Mr. Belton's not in. Mr. Belton's at Mrs. Willington's. Or Mrs. Willington's is where Mr. Belton said he'd be. The company, under the direction of A. R. Gethryn, will now visit the house of Mrs. Willington."

Aviss turned, docile. He came along in between us, quiet enough, but every now and then I heard mutters coming from him. Gethryn made the pace and it was a fast one. It was so dark that even I, who knew the place as well as a

native, was peering about me, but Gethryn walked on, never slackening. We did the three hundred yards I should think in the quickest time I've ever walked it. When five yards ahead of us I saw the faint glimmering of the Willington's white gateposts, Gethryn halted. He said to Aviss:

"You going to behave? If not, you can stay here."

I expected rebellion but it didn't come. There was a moment's pause and then in response an affirmative grunt.

"You'd better!" Gethryn said. "Come on now."

He went ahead of us this time, Aviss and I like wooden soldiers behind. At the door we stood at the foot of the three steps while Gethryn mounted them. He rang the bell. Through the glass of the door I saw the hall light leap suddenly into being. The door was opened by a girl I had never seen before. That was nothing; the Willington was as fickle with servants as she was constant with dogs. Gethryn said, abruptly:

"Mr. Belton dining here to-night?"

I could see by the angle of the girl's head that she was peering; peering out from light to darkness to see what kind of questioner this might be. She apparently decided. "Yes, sir," she said. She hesitated a little, seeming doubtful as to how to deal with this situation.

"Hasn't gone, has he? . . . Would you ask him," said Gethryn, "whether I could speak to him a moment? I won't come in, I'm in a hurry."

Again a little hesitation, then a murmur which I took for a "Very well, sir," and she was gone with a flutter of apron strings.

I saw Gethryn's hand making imperious gestures behind his back and drew Aviss away from the light and shoved him close against the wall. He seemed a little dazed now and followed like a sheep. Pause, then a shape just within

the lighted doorway. Then Belton's voice, suave still, and with a ring of astonishment in it. It said—we could hear the words quite plainly:

"If it isn't the Colonel! I'd ask you in, sir, but this is not my home."

Gethryn didn't waste any time. He said, quite naturally but in a tone several shades louder than his normal:

"Don't wonder you're not pleased to see me, but I'm giving you a tip. Perhaps that'll make up. There's someone loose with a gun. Your neighbour's just had not too wide a shave."

"Neighbour? Aviss, d'you mean?" Belton's voice was incredulous.

"I do," said Gethryn. "Thought I'd better tip you off. We're looking, of course, and I daresay Aviss will go to the police, but I thought you'd better know. Can't say why exactly."

"Mighty good of you!" Belton's voice held a strain of laughter in it.

"Not a bit. Good-night!" Gethryn came down the steps. He walked straight by us as we stood in the shadow. I felt Aviss's bulk twitch as if to follow, but put my hand on his arm and restrained him.

"Good-night, Colonel. Happy dreams!" Belton's voice came clear and mocking through the darkness. The door shut with a little slam; the light in the hall went out. I took Aviss's arm and we tiptoed out after Gethryn. He was waiting for us outside the gate in the shelter of the wall. Aviss began to speak but was cut short.

"Come on!" said Gethryn almost savagely. He fell in on Aviss's other side. We marched down the road at the same pace as we had come up it. I began to puff a little. I'm as hard as nails in one way but walking isn't my line. Once or twice Aviss attempted to speak, but Gethryn

would have none of it. The second time he said "Shut up!" so savagely that there came not another mutter from the bulk between us. Not even as we passed Belton's gate, until we were back at the bulk's house. Within it, Aviss seemed to recover himself. He led us straight into the dining room. He unlocked his sideboard and drew out, with two swoops, about sixteen bottles; but we all had whisky, even he. No one spoke until glasses were half-empty. I stood with my back against the mantelpiece, staring at that spot on the big dining table where rested Aviss's hat. The hole through its crown seemed to be looking at me like a black and malevolent little eye. Gethryn put down his glass with a small ringing smack on the sideboard. He said:

"It wasn't Mr. Belton. He couldn't have got back there in the time. I don't believe he ever left the house. It wasn't Mr. Belton's servant——"

"Eh?" said Aviss. "What d'you mean?" and then, "Oh, that gink!"

"It wasn't," repeated Gethryn, "Mr. Belton's servant apparently. According to rather a scared-looking maid, Mr. Belton's servant has gone to the pictures in Farningham. Aviss, you ought to give me a prize for saving you from making a fat-head of yourself."

Aviss seemed to chew on that. He took it like a sportsman. He had another drink and breathed hard. He managed, at last, a smile. He said:

"Guess you're right. Will I mix you one of my specials for a start?"

Gethryn grinned. "You won't! What you can do, though, is to go to bed and not show your rather impressive form outside this house again to-night. How's that?"

"That," said Aviss, "suits me. . . . You're a dead-level sport, Colonel."

"I say," said Gethryn, "where's that letter?"

Aviss smote his leg. "Gosh! I'd forgotten all about it. Come right along!"

We followed him across his square hall, and then down a little offshoot passage to the right. We got into his study, a room which I already knew. Not so large and airy and imposing a room as Belton's, but nevertheless a room in which a man might be, and was, very comfortable. He waved us to chairs. I took one and Gethryn stood, or, rather, wandered about in that apparently aimless way he sometimes has. Aviss went to the big writing table in the corner window. He fumbled among papers for a moment, then came back to us waving a buff-coloured sheet. Gethryn took it; he read it in silence; handed it to me.

It was headed in blue:

STUTZ-SHALTO CORPORATION

and bore a New York City telephone number and address which had been crossed out in ink. It ran:

My dear Earl,

In England at last! The trip I planned to make the fall before last has transpired. I am hoping that you will have me down to your English home for at least a flying visit as soon as you can. By the bye, didn't your letter a few mails ago make some reference to a Canadian you didn't like—name of Belton? Is this Belton a tallish, slimmish, any-age sort of guy with a Ziegfeld type of blondity, and the last two fingers of his left hand permanently crook'd up? If so, I hope you'll tell me all about him, and maybe give me a chance to run my rule over him when I come down to your home.

In the meantime, Earl, how about a little evening in London? I am stopping off at the Alsace, not a bad place at all. If the size and accommodation were equal to the food, fees, and flunkeys it might almost seem like a real hotel.

Your friend,

Almus Troy Schwirtz.

I made neither head nor tail of this. I handed it back in silence. Aviss looked at it.

"Know just what you're going to say, boys. Belton's not a Ziegfeld blond. Far from it. He's about as blond as the Jack o' Spades, and he hasn't—don't tell me—got funny fingers on either hand. . . . But there's such a thing, gentlemen, as hair dye, and I don't know whether you've ever noticed, but that grand old Canadian gentleman's peepers are ocean blue, as I have no doubt many an erstwhile virgin has discovered to her cost. Also, gentlemen, there are such things to-day as miracles of surgery. I see no valid reason why the Ziegfeld blond couldn't become a Hollywood brunette. It happens every other Tuesday. I see no reason, either, why crooked fingers shouldn't be put straight."

He looked first at me and then at Gethryn with that peculiar blend, which I'd noticed once before upon his face, of friendly smile and almost venomous hatred—the smile for us, the hatred for the fine old Canadian gentleman.

Gethryn said, a little abruptly, I thought:

"Who's Almus Troy Schwirtz?"

"Almus Troy Schwirtz," said Aviss, with that heavily sentimental solemnity peculiar to over-fleshed Americans, "Almus Troy Schwirtz, Colonel, is a very intimate personal friend of Earl James Aviss. A very fine, remarkable character. A great business man and a great friend. I guess you don't have much concern with the markets, Colonel—not your line—but Almus, well, there ain't really a bigger man in Wall Street to-day than Almus. I ain't saying there ain't richer men, and men who get more publicity, but I'll say—and I mean it—that if all leading American citizens were the type of Almus Troy Schwirtz, then America—bless her!—would be an even finer race than she is to-day. Now, sirs, I propose to take

a trip up to London City to-morrow—that is, if some half-caste gorilla doesn't peek in at my window to-night and blow my head off—and when I'm in London I'm just going to waddle around a bit with Almus. But after Almus and I have finished giving each other the glad hand, I'm going to get out of Almus all I can about this Ziegfeld guy of his that he thinks might be my old Canadian pal. And when I've got that out of Almus, Colonel, I am going to come right straight home and I'm going to tell you. I guess you're a little bit disappointed over that theory you were incubating in that Class A brain of yours concerning Mister Illegitimate Belton and that statement of his concerning how and where he comported himself on the night of the big shooting. But I'd like you to understand, Colonel, you've done me a real good turn to-night; you've saved me from making a bigger damned fool of myself than I was originally made, which I may say is saying something—and I'd like to do the same by you. And I'll tell you this—that though I can't help you in the matter of that alibi of Belton's, I still believe and always shall believe that, though apparently he hadn't actually what you might call a Number One first row seat at the killing, he might in some way be hitched up with it, Colonel, and if you're out to get him, by God, Colonel, I'm with you! Not only because—as Mr. Lawless here knows well—I'm not over-enamoured of the gentleman, but also because I want to help you and I want to help English justice. Therefore, says I to myself, as your great Dickens frequently puts it, therefore it's me for Almus and Almus has got to supply what he knows. Personally, I think it's too much of a coincidence that there should be two people —dirty dogs, Canadian—of the same name, one blond and the other brunette. I've got a hunch that that's the same guy, and I'm going to push that hunch for all I'm worth,

and I'm going to hand the results of my backing and pushing over to you just as soon as I can, and that, I should say, will be on the morning after to-morrow. So, Colonel, if you wouldn't mind just giving me a ring on the telephone on Thursday a.m. somewheres around ten o'clock, I'll spill to you what I've found out from Almus. . . . Now let's put this away, bring my hat in, frame it, and have a drink to the narrowest squeak that E. J. Aviss ever had in a not uneventful life!"

We didn't bring the hat in and frame it, but we did have another drink. And then, rather to my relief (I wanted to get home and think all this over), Gethryn got up to go. He wouldn't hear of Aviss driving us home. He said:

"You stay where you are and don't come to the front door. . . . Going to tell the police?"

Aviss considered. "I s'pose as at least a temporary Britisher that's my duty. As an American I'll say I'd forget all about it. Yes, I'll inform the police. But to tell you the truth, Colonel"—he had followed us into the hall and now was going through the hand-shaking ceremony— "to tell you the truth, Colonel, I'm so right down disappointed it wasn't that offal Belton and that therefore I've not even a moral right to go and fill his head with lead, that the whole incident's sort o' kind of lost interest for me."

I laughed. "If you'd lived in England as long as I have, Aviss, you wouldn't sort of lose interest in somebody trying to blow the top of your head off in Samsford village!"

He laughed at that. "I guess not, but I've lived in America. I've lived in big cities in America. I'm not saying anything against my own country—God forbid!—but if you lived in a country where for two hundred dollars you could get the King of Siam bumped off any minute you wanted to, you wouldn't think so much of somebody aërating a Stetson for you."

"Aërating a Stetson!" said Gethryn as we turned out of the gate into the road. He laughed.

I said:

"Fairly full of guts, anyhow. But then he's got plenty of room for 'em. . . . Look here, Gethryn, I think either that I'm mad and all the rest of the world is sane, or, preferably, that I'm the only sane person in a large spherical lunatic asylum. . . . I say, oughtn't we to have beaten round a bit to try and find out who *did* shoot?"

He shook his head. "What'd be the good in this light? Waste of time."

We did the rest of the walk without speaking. At my gate and the spare wheel of the Voisin I said:

"Coming in for a last one?"

"No, thanks," he said. "Look here, I shall want you to-morrow. What about it?"

I considered. I said:

"Four days or twenty-five years ago I had a veterinary practice. Well, I suppose it doesn't matter. After this I can always join the police. . . . Yes. When, how, and where? D'you want me, I mean."

He climbed into the Voisin before he answered. As the engine began to tick,

"Ring you before nine," he said. "Good-night!"

He slipped her into first gear and was off. I yelled "Good-night" after him and went into the house. Automatically—I think it's the only way in which I'm even a reasonable imitation of a reasonable English householder—I went round the house and saw that everything was locked. I wandered about and finally sat down with a book. That lasted me about ten minutes and then I found myself on the prowl again. My mind was so full of all the matters of this incomprehensible day that it rejected all those things which I'd hoped would so occupy it as to keep it off what

it really wanted to think about; rejected them, and got on to the forbidden subject. . . .

I threw the book down and went upstairs. I undressed myself and got into pajamas and a dressing gown. I wondered why I had been such a fool as not to offer Gethryn my spare bed. The fact of having him in the house would at least have given me the small duties of a host to think about. I went into the bathroom; began lackadaisically to fiddle with glasses and toothbrushes and toothpaste. I'd got a laden brush halfway to my mouth when a small, faint sound came to my ear. An odd sound; a sound which seemed to offend the stillness of that still night more grievously than would a louder. I waited; it came again. I flung up the bottom of the window and leaned out. At first I thought there was nothing, then I saw that the little patch of deeper shadow on the path just within my gate was real and not imaginary. And once more the sound came—still an odd sound; still an unpleasant sound. It was a sound which, without the glass between me and it, I knew for the groaning of a man. I was down the stairs in three jumps. The rattle I made with bolt and chain, getting the door undone, would have wakened any sleepers less sound than the old Yules. I flung open the door; I was just going to rush down the path when a memory came to me of other things that had happened that night. My mother was Scottish. I've got a loaded leather stick in my whip-rack, and I took this now and wrapped its thong round my wrist before I went out.

I needn't have. That black smudge which I'd seen from my window was Gethryn. Nowhere else was a sound or sight or smell of man or beast.

I put my hands under his armpits and dragged him into the house; into the light.

He had a long superficial tear across the top of his fore-

head just where the hair began; he had a rapidly blackening lump just behind his left ear; he was breathing heavily and slow.

I dragged him into the drawing room, knelt down, put an arm under his knees and another under his shoulders, and with a heave got him onto the couch. I went over him. So many incredible things had happened to me that day on top of all my wretchedness that this last, as soon as I found that all that was wrong with him was the mildest concussion, didn't even astonish me. I did what was necessary and waited.

He must have the constitution of a dray horse. In a time so short that I won't state it for fear of being disbelieved, he was sitting up and talking. There was a reek of iodine in the room. He said:

"Sorry an' all that! Very silly, and not even dramatic. You didn't see the smash. . . . Wheel came off. Near-rear. Just at the top of the hill there's a bit of bank I always run over to get the turn sharp. Damn lucky for me—if I'd taken it properly on the level and slow, the wheel would've come off later when I was going about seventy on the way home. As it was, I just got pitched out. Met a tree or something; it seemed to have a grudge against me."

He stopped there and looked at me. "That car," he said. "I went over it myself—radiator to breakfast time—yesterday. Only back from the Voisin-Maxwell works a week. Question: Should the wheel come off? Answer:?"

I said:

"No. You sit there."

I ran upstairs and shoved on a pair of flannel bags over my pajamas, took off my dressing gown, and was off up the hill at a steady trot in a couple of minutes. I found the Voisin where he had said, upside down on the lower slope of the high bank which marks the junction of the hill with

the new arterial road. The near-rear wheel was so far away that it took me ten minutes to find it. The hub cap I couldn't find. I very much doubted whether it was findable just at present. On the screw I found, with the aid of the torch I had taken with me, the deep scratchings of hasty spanner work. I went back.

He was walking about when I got there, up and down, up and down. There was a frown between his brows and above it the brown-stained scar showed angry. I said:

"That's right enough. Dirty business. You shove off to bed now, come on!"

He waved an impatient hand at me. "For God's sake, man!" he said. "I'm thinking."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

GETHRYN had, so far as I know, four hours' sleep that night. It was two when I got him into bed and six when I heard him once more walking about.

I didn't sleep. I sometimes wondered whether it was that which made the very strange day in front of me seem so altogether remote from real life. I don't mean, mind you, that my feelings of that day weren't real; the trouble was, I think, that they were too real. I mean that it was as if, instead of being in charge of my own life, some wild and irresponsible god had thought to himself: "I'll have a bit of fun to-day and I'll have it with that poor sap Michael Lawless. He's been through a lot and I'll bet he's expecting a bit of an easy. Right! He shan't have it! He hasn't understood much of all that's been going on to and round him. We'll just see if we can't make that a bit worse. He's sore and we'll make him sorer. He's bewildered and we'll make him really begin to think he's mad. He's sound and we'll just see if we can't dent him."

It began at seven. I've said that I heard Gethryn walking about his room at six. I was still reading then, or trying to read, but at seven (I looked at my watch to make sure of the time) I heard him open the door very softly and creep downstairs. Now, you never know with these fellows that have had a crack over the head. I'm not snoopy, but I opened my door and listened. He was at the telephone. I heard him ask for Victoria 4000 again. That's how my day began! Quite shamelessly I listened. After

all, this was my affair as well as his. They put him through at last. He said who he was and asked whether by any chance Chief Detective Inspector Pike was there. If he wasn't, would they give him Inspector Pike's private number? Inspector Pike can't have been there, for I heard a tinkle as Gethryn rang off, and then a moment later his voice asking for another number—Kennington something-or-other. A pause and then:

"Is that Kennington [something-or-other]? I'm sorry to telephone at this time but I want to speak to Mr. Pike very urgently. . . . Yes, Gethryn. . . . No, GETHRYN. . . . G for George, E for Edward, T for Tommy, H for ham and eggs, R for Rotten, Y for Yucatan, N for Nobody. . . . No, that's not right but try it." Pause. "That you, Pike? . . . Yes, Gethryn here. . . . Look; things are stirring a bit. I wondered whether Mr. Lucas and you had been able to get anything about Grenville and Belton and possibly the euphonious Guffy. . . . Eh? . . . When did you post it? . . . Oh, that means I shan't get it till the midday post. Can you give me any idea? . . . Excellent fellow! . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . What's that? . . . Which was inside? . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Half a minute, do they *know* he's still interested? . . . Fairly certain, eh? . . . Right. . . . Thanks. . . . Yes. . . . No, that's excellent. . . . I'll stand you the *most* expensive dinner. . . . Yes, I wish you could, too. . . . No, the actual *police* are all right; it's the great fat-headed, slab-sided, bull-necked, comic-paper soldier they've got in charge of them that's the matter. . . . No, I don't think so. The only thing is—well, it wouldn't make me swoon if there were more about Guffy. It's such a pleasing name for one thing. Well, it can't be helped and you've done wonders. . . . I say, Pike, don't you think it's perfectly scandalous the way these nosy amateur investigators get all their real work done through Scotland Yard? . . . Yes. . . . Oh, Mr.

*Pike!* This is *too* much! Good-bye and very many thanks!"

A tinkle and he was coming upstairs again. I waited for him at the top. I said:

"I've been listening. How's the head?"

"Pretty fair," he said. "Opens and shuts a bit, but on the whole pretty good. I say, what does that dear old woman do in the way of breakfast and how quick d'you think she could do it? I know I'm being importunate but I can't help myself. Busy day for us, Lawless."

I took him by the arm and shoved him back in his room. I went and got my things and dressed his head and tidied up. I must say, for what he'd been through, he looked pretty fit. He looked, bandage and all, fitter than I felt. I had a shower and rammed on some clothes and went and found Mrs. Yule. She got breakfast in half an hour.

Gethryn took six minutes over his and then drove off in my Morris. He said he'd send it back from Farningham. He also said that I was to wait until he rang me up. That seemed to be all I was getting—waiting. I telephoned to Clayton again. If he didn't know already that I was a potential criminal—*Read our Famous Murder Cases. Next week: "The Horse Doctor of Samsford"*—and therefore likely to be having my work interrupted by urgent private affairs, he must have wondered what the hell had happened to me. But still, he was very decent. Yes, he would do my urgent stuff. No, nothing out of the way had happened. Had I seen Tomlinson's filly?

Yes, I had seen Tomlinson's filly.

Didn't I think that Tomlinson's filly was the most juvenile case of laminitis a man could well imagine?

No, I didn't think Tomlinson's filly had laminitis at all. I thought Tomlinson's filly had been jumping about Tomlinson's cobbled yard and had bruised all her frogs, but doubtless Mr. Clayton's diagnosis was far more cor-

rect than mine. Anyhow, if Tomlinson wanted anything to-day, would Mr. Clayton please to do it for me, with all the other cases?

He would, and he was sure, much as he respected Mr. Lawless's opinion, that Tomlinson's filly *was* the most juvenile case of laminitis he had ever seen.

I went out to Yule in the yard. He was fussing about the bay. Ever since that morning when I made the thing take the tree jump, he'd not been able to leave it alone. I said:

"Yule! If I were to come and tell you that a filly—three next time and kept in a cobbled yard and over-corned—had hot feet and that I thought she had laminitis, what'd you say?"

He looked at me solemnly, his bright eyes twinkling out of his impossibly lined face. He said:

"Nowt, sir."

"What," I said, "would you think?"

"What I'd think," he said, "I wouldn't say to you, sir."

I felt better after that. I looked about the boxes, and then the telephone sent me rushing back to the house again. I beat Mrs. Yule to the instrument by a short head. It was Gethryn. He was very short.

"Got to go to town. Your car's coming back about twelve. Hang on to hear from me. Got it?"

(2)

I made them open the mill-house gate into the park. There had been nothing else for it. I'd had a saddle shoved on the bay and was out for a ride. I think I've said before that, at any rate to my mind, there's nothing like a doubtful horse to keep your mind off everything else but him.

And he *was* doubtful, or I was. One moment, pass a steam siren at full blast without flicking an ear, and the next cut up extraordinarily rough at an old three-ha'penny stamp half hidden in the gutter. But he was better after I'd got him into the park and let him have a good cut round.

It was just after eleven when I turned him round and shoved his very well-bred little head toward home. I was halfway back to that mill-house gate—which is the only entrance to the ancient right-of-way—when I saw at the edge of the belt of trees on my left a flicker of white. My heart gave one of those sudden and absolutely sickening thumps. I quite honestly believe that if Nebuchadnezzar—the name was Varney's, not mine—had as much as shied, I'd have taken a beautiful voluntary. I couldn't see what that flicker of white was. I couldn't have known what that flicker of white was. And yet I did. Somehow I both saw and knew and, being as usual a bit of a damned fool, I switched Nebuchadnezzar's head toward it, clapped my heels into him and off we went. He resented the turn-off from the line that led to home but after we'd gone a few strides he began to enjoy himself. He travelled. I ride so many horses so often that I suppose I've lost something of that thrill of speed, but I seemed to get it again that morning, in full measure. . . .

The white that had been a flicker grew larger; it was a shape; it was a woman; I had been right.

She didn't go away or hide or do anything else that any lesser woman who didn't want to speak to me would have done. She stood where she was when she saw I was headed for her. For once the bay behaved like a gentleman. He pulled up when I told him, and stood. I think something had told him that if he misbehaved I was quite likely to have his head sawn off.

I raised my cap. It wasn't exactly white that I'd seen. She had on a frock of some creamy-coloured stuff which was like linen and yet somehow finer than any linen. I remember it had black at the neck and wrists. She had no hat. She bowed as I saluted, a stiff formal little bow which hurt like hell. I was left with nothing to say. I dropped the reins, swung my leg over, and reached ground. There was a queer wobbly feeling to my knees. I suddenly realized that what I had thought was a hot day was a cold one.

I suppose it was because I was tired and harassed and bewildered, or perhaps it was a trick of that malevolent little god that I wrote about just now. Anyhow, whatever it was, I said at once the wrong thing. I said, without any pretense at the conventions:

"You don't want to see me again, do you?"

And then, just for a moment, her heavy lids were raised over those eyes which I suppose I must call gray for lack of a better word. For that moment they seemed to me tender and exciting and so beautiful, both in themselves and the implication of their look, that I almost reached out my arms.

But then the lids drooped again, and once more there was a look in those eyes to match the voice which, travelling over the wire seventy-two hours ago, had merely by its note turned life from a thing to be eagerly desired to a gray and unreal shadowgraph. She said:

"I'm afraid I don't understand you."

For one crazy half minute there surged up in me a very sane impulse. Almost the reins were dropped; almost I took the two strides which would have covered the ground between us; but I didn't. I said:

"I think you want to say, Lady Grenville, that you'd rather not consider what I mean."

I raised my cap again, swung a leg over the momentarily obedient little bay, rammed my heels into his flanks, and let him have his head. . . .

(3)

I suppose the general feeling of unreality about that day was helped on by the amount of whisky which I very foolishly drank. It's always seemed a most extraordinary thing to me that however immune a man may consider himself from orthodoxy, if he is wretched about a woman, he will—in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred—immediately become really heavy Lyceum and start knocking back far more alcohol than is good for him. What a teetotaler does in these circumstances I haven't any idea. Probably something much more beastly.

Anyhow, although I remember everything that happened after I'd left her standing there among the trees, the memory is jerky and broken and filmed over with a sort of hard, quite unlifelike gloss. I don't quite know what that means, but it's the best I can do. What I did between getting home just before lunch and three o'clock is of no consequence. It involved the raising and lowering of too many glasses. At three the telephone went. Gethryn. He sounded blithe enough. He said:

"Unclean antics at the crossing of the ways. I'm just ringing to tell you to stay put. Your guardian still about?"

I felt I was just at the stage where everything, except my own feelings, struck me as funny. I don't mean at the stage of drink. I mean in that state of mind. I said:

"Haven't looked for him. Hold on and I'll go and see."

I went out and into the road and walked fifty yards down the hill and fifty yards up. But not a trace of my very plain man or his bicycle. I went back to the telephone and reported.

"My doing, young fellow," said the telephone. "Be with you in about an hour."

I'd hardly rung off when the bell went again. This time it was Aviss, saying:

"Colonel Gethryn with you?"

I told him No.

Pause.

"Guess I'll leave a message," he said at last. "See here, Lawless, remember that letter from Almus Schwirtz I showed you last night? Well, I've said howdy to Almus over the wire this morning and I'm just now right off to celebrate his first visit to this country at a meeting in town. If you tell the Colonel—will you be seeing him?"

"Think so," I said. "Almost sure to."

"Then just you tell him, Lawless, that if I get anything out of Almus about you know what, I'll get him on the long-distance. Know where I'll find him? Should say it'll be about 6 p.m. when I ring, if I ring at all—six to seven."

I said: "No idea. Only thing I can suggest would be to ring him here."

Another pause.

Then: "Yep. I'll do just that little thing. So long, Lawless, good hunting!"

Then nothing until four o'clock; and sharp on the stroke of four, Gethryn.

As I've said before, that fellow must have the constitution of a dray horse. He was pale; the iodine-stained scar across his forehead was angry; the bruise behind the left ear was green and black and blue. But yet he looked even more keenly alive than ever I'd seen him before. I'd left the front door open and he came straight in to where I was sitting. I remember that he looked at me for a long moment. He refused a drink. He said:

"That's awkward now!"

"What is?"

He looked at me again and then away. "Nothing much. Don't take life so hard."

I know what I said but it wouldn't be advisable to print it here. He grinned. He sat down on the chair that I'd almost come to consider—even in so short a time as twenty-four hours—his own. He said:

"*Ça marche*. Very much it does. Feel all right for a busy evening?"

"The busier," I said, "the better. What's on?"

He looked at me. "The devil may know, but if he does he won't split and certainly I won't. I just know we're going to be busy. Also I'm expecting a caller. D'you mind?"

I shook my head. "Not a bit. Who?"

He smiled again. "Old friend of yours. Divisional Inspector Dudley Cross."

I laughed. As I've said, things which weren't really, were striking me as funny. I asked:

"Is his name Dudley?"

"Couldn't say, but he looks like it."

An odd thing happened then. There came the sound of a car pulling up outside. A ring at the bell, and then Mrs. Yule opening the door of the room where we sat and saying: "Inspector Cross to see you, sir."

Gethryn winked at me. Cross came in. He was in plain clothes to-day. It always strikes me that the person who started calling policemen's mufti plain clothes has been responsible for a great deal. I suppose, poor devils, they think they've got to live up to the description. And then another strange thing. I began to like Inspector Cross. I even began to suspect him of a sense of humour. He bowed stiffly, first to me and then to Gethryn, but it was to Gethryn he spoke.

"Taken the liberty, sir," he said, "of doing as you suggested this morning and coming to see you here." He broke off. He looked round at me. I didn't need to be clairvoyant to see that I was de trop. But I was in a hoggish mood that day. I sat on.

Gethryn came to the rescue. "I don't see why you shouldn't say anything you like," he said, "in front of Mr. Lawless. If you insist, I'll come outside, but don't insist."

The inspector didn't. But he was, in what he said, very guarded. I relented a little. Made him sit down and gave him a cigarette and some beer. Extraordinarily sensitive he was for a policeman. He actually coloured when I gave him these things. He said to Gethryn:

"Well, I've had a word with *him*, sir, but——" He shrugged. A hopeless, helpless gesture.

Gethryn smiled. "What did I tell you? What does he want to do? I suppose turn Dinwater out into the cold world again, tell him he's damn lucky not to have been hanged, and fill his cell with—— Well, what's the matter with Mr. Lawless? The next cell to be occupied—well, by somebody else."

The inspector didn't smile. But he nodded.

"You're joking, sir, but you're right. To put it in a nutshell that's almost exactly what he did say. I tell you, sir, I don't know what to do. I don't like seeing the force made fools of, and I don't like, any more than anyone else, seeing —well, seeing the wrong people——" He paused, at a loss for a word.

"Humiliated," said Gethryn.

"That's it, sir. And there's another thing. While we go off on all these wrong tacks, we're missing the right one." He smiled rather ruefully. It was at this point that I began to discover that he was likable. He said:

"Not that I can see yet which the right one is, but I got an idea, sir, knowing what I do know of you, that you have. In fact, you almost told me as much this morning."

"I told you that, Inspector," Gethryn said, "because I thought it was only fair. You gave me a tip, when there was no need for you to, that you were beginning to work along the Mr.-Lawless-Lady-Grenville line. Also, you took my hint and removed Mr. Lawless's shadow. I thought the least I could do, in return for your courtesy, was to tell you that I was getting a good way along another line—one which, so far, you haven't happened to strike."

Cross coughed. "Thank you, sir. Very good of you. . . . But if I may ask, sir—I hardly know how to put it——"

"What you're trying to say," said Gethryn, "is 'where are we?' "

"Exactly, sir."

Gethryn grinned. "D'you know, Inspector, Mr. Lawless asked me exactly that question about two minutes before you came. I told him *I* didn't know."

"Didn't know, sir?" The inspector's voice was bewildered and incredulous. "How do you mean, sir?"

"Exactly what I say. Look here, this thing—like all these things, perhaps more than some—is like a jig-saw puzzle. *You've* got none of the right pieces. *I* happen to have collected some, but whether I've got them all, I don't know. Certainly I haven't made a complete picture. Bits of it I have got, of course. All nicely joined. But other bits are still messing about, homeless. . . . Now I want to ask *you* a question. What're you going to do? The police, I mean."

The inspector shifted anxiously in his chair. "God knows, sir. I've managed to head *him* off doing anything irreparable yet, but how long I can keep him off, I don't know. That's what's worrying me."

Gethryn considered this. "Look here!" he said. "Can you keep him quiet for another forty-eight hours? No; say seventy-two?"

The inspector reflected. He looked most unhappy. He said:

"God knows. You see, the coroner's been badgering him and I couldn't get him, much as I tried, to put off the resumption of the inquest for more than a couple of days. It's going to open again on Friday morning. Now the point is, sir, will he want to get rid of Dinwater and get somebody else before the inquest or will he let us just go quietly on and use the inquest as part of our inquiry? You can ask me the answer, sir, until all's blue. I don't know. I shan't know p'raps until to-morrow night."

Gethryn stood up and began to pace about the room. He said, with an abrupt change of subject:

"Mr. Aviss turn up at all after I left this morning?"

The inspector nodded. "He did. Gave me the whole story about his being shot at just as you had before, sir. He didn't seem to be much worried, I must say. Seemed to me almost as though he was disappointed somehow."

I laughed. "Disappointed because it couldn't have been Belton who shot at him. If it had been——"

Cross looked at me. His rather stiff, official-seeming face broke into a very human smile. "Exactly, Mr. Lawless."

Gethryn broke in again with another change of subject. He said: "Those statements I gave you this morning. Suppose you haven't had time to check 'em up yet?"

The inspector looked pained. "Plenty of time, sir. The results are here." He took out a bulging wallet, and from it two sheets.

Gethryn took them to the window and stood there reading. He said when he'd finished:

"Mind if I show them to Mr. Lawless?"

Cross shook his head. "As long as I don't see, sir."

The door opened just as I rose. Mrs. Yule looked in. "There's a maid, sir, come on a bicycle from Colonel Thaxted's over at Little Bury. Colonel's Alsatian's had some sort of a naccident, sir."

"Tell her I'm busy," I said. "They'd better get Mr. Clayton."

Mrs. Yule was distressed. "Please, sir—beggin' your pardon, sir—the girl says they've tried and she's crying her eyes out and they're that fond of the dog. Please, sir —please, sir, if you could——"

I sighed. "*All* right. Want my car any more, Gethryn?"

He folded up the sheets that Cross had given him and slipped them into his pocket. "No, thanks," he said. "White's bringing the Voisin here. They promised to rush the repairs through by four. How long'll you be?"

I looked at my watch. "Should be back by a quarter to six at the latest."

He nodded. "I'll wait," he said.

I went out to the tearful dog lover. As I closed the door behind me, I heard Cross beginning to speak.

(4)

All the way to that case—a matter of seven or eight miles—with the still weeping girl sitting beside me and the handle bars of her bicycle, which we'd rammed into the rumble seat, tickling my neck as I drove, I was hoping and praying, to whatever God I may have owned at the moment, that it wouldn't be an intricate one. I couldn't get anything out of the girl. I don't suppose really that I tried very hard. When I got there, it turned out to be only a matter of stitching. The dog had been fighting with a

bull terrier—always a foolish thing for any dog to do—and one of those sudden slashing bites had torn his shoulder open. I put twelve stitches in him, bandaged him up, and left everybody happy.

When I got back to my own house, the police car had gone but once more the Voisin-Maxwell stood outside the gate. I drew up the Morris behind it and went indoors. Time, 5:35 p.m. I went into the drawing room. Gethryn was just turning away from the telephone. He said:

"Bit of a blow! I wanted Lady Grenville and she's not there."

I was quite numb by this time and I didn't even mind talking about her. I said:

"How do you mean, not there? Did they say when she'd be back?"

"She's gone to stay with friends. She's left instructions that no one except the authorities—sinister word *authorities*—is to be told where she's gone. She wants quiet, rest, and peace. All very right. All very proper. But unfortunate. I wanted to pay a visit to the Hall to-night. And you too. I'd rather have done it as an invited guest, but if I can't, well, there it is."

Mrs. Yule had put out the whisky, thereby probably saving herself a telling off. I walked over to the table by the window and helped myself to a stiffish drink. I said:

"Half a minute! Whom did you speak to?"

He shrugged. "Some servant or other. A man."

I looked at him. "Butler?"

"No. Shouldn't think so. Not like his voice. More servile and more inhuman."

I didn't say anything. I walked over to the telephone and picked it up and asked for the Hall number. A woman's voice answered me—one of the maids. I said: "Is Mr. Bland there?"

I expected to be asked to hold on a moment. What I expected didn't happen. The telephone said:

"Mr. Bland's away. He's on holiday."

"Mr. Lawless speaking," I said. "Could you give me Lady Grenville's address?"

Embarrassed pause.

"Sir—" said the telephone at last, "sir—I'm afraid her ladyship's away."

"I know. But where is she?"

"I'm sorry, sir," said the telephone, "I couldn't say."

I gave up trying and said instead: "House shut up, is it?"

"No, sir. Not what you might call shut up. Mr. Bland's away and one of the footmen, but all the other servants are here, sir."

I muttered thanks and rang off.

"What's the time?" Gethryn asked. I told him twenty to six.

"How soon," he said, "can that dear old woman of yours get us a meal? Anything as long as it'll last."

I was past asking questions. In fact, I didn't say anything. I went out and had a word with Mrs. Yule. I came back and said:

"Supper will be served in a quarter of an hour, Colonel."

He glared at me. "Don't *you* say that word," he said. "That's reserved for enemies and acquaintances. If you feel respectful, call me Uncle, but not Colonel. Can't stand it. Makes my belly stick out and my ears red."

He walked over to the table and helped himself to a drink, only less stiff than the one I took immediately afterward. He said:

"Got a gun? Pocket size, I mean."

I was just going to say No when I remembered the automatic I'd bought from young Rogers a year before.

I'd given him a quid and he'd given me the gun and we'd called it square about the tenner he'd borrowed from me. I said:

"Yes, of sorts. No ammunition, though."

"A gun," he said, "is a gun for all that. If you use a gun properly, you need hardly ever fire it."

I looked at him. "Why all this gun stuff?" I asked.

He wandered over to the window and stood looking out over my garden toward the park wall and the tree tops which showed above it.

"Oh, just colour, you know," he said vaguely.

I thought what an annoying devil he was. I was going to tell him so when the phone rang again. I went to it. A voice said: "Are you Samsford 12? . . . London wants you. Hold the line."

The London that wanted me was Aviss. He said:

"That you, Lawless? Colonel there?"

"Hold on," I said. I beckoned Gethryn and gave him the instrument. I went back to my chair and my drink. I heard:

"Yes. . . . Yes. . . . It's Gethryn. . . . Yes. . . . I recognized your voice. Oh, just a minute. I'll repeat it after you and get Lawless to take it down. Hold on." He opened the drawer of the writing table, twitched out a piece of paper, flicked a pencil from his pocket, and beckoned to me. I came over. There was no chair handy, so I knelt. As he spoke I wrote:

". . . George Rufus Billington . . . age 36, may look younger . . . height approx 5-ft 10 to 11. Build slim. Colouring fair (hair sandy; beard, if any, darkish brown; eyes grayish). Born Canada. Believed operated U. S. and South America during past twelve years. Successful with women. Unpopular with men. Slight cast in left eye. Third and little finger left hand crook'd. Walks with very slight

limp. Superficially well-educated. Most plausible. Speaks American, English, German, French. Was associated with the Mullhall gang. Ascertained to be in England now. Exact whereabouts unknown. May have visited England previously—no certain information. Will probably say he's Australian. Weaknesses—poker and horses, especially horses."

Behind his back Gethryn made a sign and I stopped writing. He said into the telephone:

"Many thanks. I'll see what I can do with that. Any chance of seeing you this evening? . . . Pity! . . . Never mind. To-morrow will do. Suppose I call. . . . Now let's see—I could be with you at 11:30. How'd that suit? . . . Right. Thanks. . . . 11:30 it is. Good-bye."

I looked at what I'd written down. I said:

"I think I'm a bit more than ordinarily observant. But even if I wasn't, I could tell you that Belton hasn't got any cast. His fingers on both hands are as straight as mine and he doesn't walk with a limp. . . . By Gosh, though——"

Gethryn shook his head. "No, I've looked at that servant more carefully than you. No cast. Straight fingers. Well, well! Well, well!"

Mrs. Yule, minutes ahead of her time, opened the door. She said: "Sir, there's supper."

We went in to it. She's a marvel, that old woman. How she could guess what a man would like to eat at an extraordinary hour like six o'clock I can't think. I don't remember what she gave us, but I do remember that it went. . . .

(5)

Considering that he'd asked for food so early, I thought, even in that curious state of mind I was in—wherein time really was just a man-made convenience and not a govern-

ing factor in one's life—that Gethryn took too much of it over that meal. We didn't go out of the dining room until after seven. I remember saying as at last we pushed back our chairs:

"Can't we *do* something?"

And I remember Gethryn grinning and saying:

"There's plenty to do, but there's a time for doing it."

I wished that time would come. We went into the other room and fidgeted. I had one drink and another. When I went for the third, I saw Gethryn raise his brows and put the stopper back in the decanter. Perhaps he was right. He kept wandering to the window, looking out; it seemed at the sky. We talked a bit. I didn't start any of the conversations.

And then, at about a quarter to eight, the balloon began to go up. I didn't recognize the beginnings of its ascent, but then I don't think anybody, even if they'd been in a saner state of mind than I was, would have.

Suddenly the telephone rang. We'd been silent for a quarter of an hour and this shattering of the quietness made me jump out of my chair. Shows what sort of a state my nerves were in. I got there first. A voice—a familiar voice but for the moment unplaceable—asked whether I was Mr. Lawless and if so, whether Colonel Gethryn was with me. If he was, could he speak.

He spoke. Listening, it took me no more than a few seconds to realize who it was at the other end. Cross. I could gather nothing from Gethryn's yes's and no's but he put me straight when, after no more than two minutes' talk, he had rung off. He said:

"That was Cross. That fossilized frog who's this county's chief constable is getting awkward. But nothing definite. Cross *may* be able to stop him from issuing orders for the arrest of a veterinary surgeon known as Michael

Lawless within the next forty-eight hours. Or he may not."

"But Sheila, man! Sheila!" I said.

He shook his head. "Cross said nothing, so I say nothing. But cheer up. Frogs are frightened of high places. They stick, if you follow me, to the shallows. That's when they're not entirely certain of themselves." He was over at the window now again, staring out at the sky. . . . He wheeled suddenly and said:

"Look here, there's not much time. If I were to start and tell you what I mean, I might in the first place make a fool of myself. In the second, I might so muddle you that you'd be worse off than if you acted blind. Will you follow along without understanding?"

"Yes." I was emphatic. "Only for God's sake, let's *do* something—soon. I like you but I'm getting sick of you in this room. I want to *do* something, man. I don't know where I am or which way I'm facing. I'm all raw inside and my head's like a bran mash. If I'd something to do—anything!—I wouldn't mind."

He grinned. He didn't speak but he looked at his watch. He waved me into silence. He began pacing the room again, hands buried in his pockets, chin almost resting on his waistcoat. Walking like this, passing me and repassing me as I sat back in my chair, the cut across his head seemed to glare at me. I remembered quite suddenly that because of this extraordinary day and my extraordinary feelings about this extraordinary day, I'd never even mentioned that smash of his on the night before. I said:

"You must think me a swine. How's the head?"

He didn't look up. He grunted something which I took for assurance that the head was all right. Another thought struck me. I remembered Cross and Cross's visit. I said:

"Aviss went to the police this morning. Did you? What I mean is: does Cross know that someone fixed your car?"

He looked up at that and grunted. "No," he said. "No and no! Cross isn't a bad fellow but he's got limitations. You mustn't confuse Cross. I didn't confuse Cross. He asked about my head, of course. I told him I'd had a bit of a crash. I didn't, though, tell him that the crash was malevolently fathered."

He kept looking at his watch and each time he looked at his watch he went back to the window. I began to fidget. Somehow, though he was quiet and cool enough, I felt that he was fidgety too. But just as I thought I couldn't stand any more of it, he acted. He'd been looking out into the rapidly gathering dusk. It had been a hot day, but cloudy. The rains we'd been wanting for so long were on the way. Darkness was coming earlier than usual. He suddenly swung round on me. His body, as he walked about the room, had been slack; his shoulders had been bent and his head had been low between them. But now the whole man was taut. He said:

"Here's your something to do."

I sat up waiting. He ran his eye over me, rather like a sergeant-major before a general inspection. He said:

"Better get that gun. Got any darker clothes? Easy clothes."

I looked down at my suit of gray flannel. I thought of the old brown tweed. I nodded.

"Rubber shoes? Not white."

I thought of my crêpe-soled brogues and nodded again.

"Go and get the lot," he said. "Especially the gun."

(6)

I must say that a Voisin-Maxwell, when it's not going over forty-five, is as near to silent as any car can be. We purred up the hill, swung left, and drew to a noiseless

sudden halt beside Belton's gate. Almost before the wheels had finished turning, Gethryn was out of the car. He signed to me to get out too. I got. He said: "Stand by!" He stepped by me and leaned over the side of the car and switched off not only the headlights, but every light. He went on: "If I come out talking to anyone, still stand by. If I say 'Now!' . . ." He told me what he wanted.

The last word had hardly left his lips when he was gone. In spite of the loose gravel, his feet made scarcely any sound. I stood back from the faint glimmer of the lantern over Belton's gatepost and watched. The night was so quiet that even from where I stood, yards away, I heard the dim interior tinkle of the door bell as he pressed it.

Nothing.

The door opened. A light sprang into being behind it. I heard a murmur of voices and then silence again. Then another murmur lasting longer than the first.

And then footsteps crunching down the gravel of the drive. Gethryn's. I could almost have sworn that he was trying to be noisy this time. Someone else's too—a man's by the sound of them. They got nearer and nearer, these footsteps. I waited. I hardly knew what I was waiting for, but Gethryn's last words kept repeating themselves like the ghost of a gramophone record in my head. The footsteps drew nearer. Reached the gate. I drew back still farther away from the gatepost light. The light was suddenly blocked from my vision. I saw, for a flickering dim instant, two forms, one tall and one shorter. Then, suddenly, Gethryn's voice. It said, with an effective casualness, so admirably suggested that almost I thought the man with him was not the man he'd intended to bring:

"I don't turn up there, do I?"

They came close to the car. Now Gethryn's footsteps

were silent on the beaten dirt of the footpath, but the other man's rang out upon the hard earth. The pair were almost on top of me now. In spite of the darkness, I could see them—straight strokes of blackness, and white ovals which were their faces. I stood absolutely still. A voice came; I suppose I'd heard it many times before, but never before taken notice of it. It said:

"No, sir." It was a voice deferential and yet impertinent, like the voice of a servant in an amateur farce, where the humour is supplied by the actor and not the thought. "No, sir," it said. It had a nasal twang to it. "You keep right straight past the house, past the toyning down to the schools——"

That was the last word. Its owner didn't mean it to be, but as it came out there was a sudden flurry. My eyes had got used to the darkness by this time and I saw the whole thing; not certainly, as I should have in daylight, but with a total effect that perhaps gave much more permanence in my mind. They didn't seem like real men. They seemed like dark figures in a darker dream.

The taller figure—Gethryn's—suddenly jumped back on soundless feet; jumped back and then jumped forward again and as he jumped forward, his right arm, which had been drawn downward and backward until the fist was on a level with its hips, shot upward and outward. There was a glove on that fist, I knew; a heavy driving glove. It muffled the sound of the blow. There was a dull, clapping, hollow and yet ringing report as the knuckles met the neck of the other man just below the left ear.

"Now!" said Gethryn's voice.

I jumped. I was a bit late with my jump, but I caught the crumpling limpness just before its head would have met the earth. I drew in my breath with a little hiss. I've

seen a good many punches in my time; and taken a few; and given a few. But that was a peach.

"Out?" said Gethryn's voice.

"Yes." I'd been bending down listening to the breathing. "What next?" Gethryn came to us in a stride and a half. He knelt beside me as I crouched there on the beaten earth pathway holding the blond, lifeless-seeming head on my knees. He said:

"Turn him over quick."

I turned him over. There was a rapid fumbling in the darkness. I saw the white of the length of cord which had come from Gethryn's pocket but I couldn't see, because of the darkness and his speed, exactly what he was doing until it was done. He had gagged the man with a small silken scarf. He had tied the wrists together behind the back and the legs at ankle and knee. He gave a little grunt. He looked to his right; to his left; behind him and before him. He seemed satisfied.

"Hoist him up," he said.

I hoisted.

"Undo the flap," he said.

I undid the flap of the back-seat cover.

"Shove him in," he said.

We shoved him in.

(7)

I'm not as a rule nervous when driven by other people—that is, if the speed is under fifty miles per hour—especially when I know, as I knew in this case, that the driver has forgotten more about driving than ever I knew. But when the driving is along three miles of rough, narrow cart track without headlights and at an average of thirty-five, I frankly hate it. I knew these lanes. Lanes used—and only occasionally at that—merely by slow-moving

wagons and farm carts. I discovered on that journey that my frequently recurring thought of that day, the thought that perhaps after all death was preferable to life, was untrue.

But we came to the end without mishap. I confess that for the last minutes of our journey my eyes had been shut. I opened them now. The car was between high hedges which were double blackness against the blackness of the night. A few yards ahead, on my left, I could see, as a faint gap in this thicker blackness, the glimmer of a gate. It was the gate which leads off a track from Samsford church to the Hall home farm and lets one onto a footpath across a meadow and so into the eastern side of the grounds of the Hall itself.

Gethryn's voice, very low but perfectly clear, roused me. "Come on!" it said savagely. He was out of the car and at my side. He jerked open the door and I got down. After a second's fumbling, he jerked free the off-side strip of the rear-seat covering. He pulled a torch out of his pocket and flashed its light under the cover. He seemed satisfied, for he buckled the strip back and started without pause for the gateway. He didn't speak. I followed. He put his left hand on the gate and vaulted it clean. That was a trick I could do. I did it. My eyes began to grow accustomed to the light or lack of light. Rubber shoes hissed gently in the dew-drenched grass of the meadow. We were fifty yards across that quarter of a mile when he began to run, a long loping trot. I kept level with him, shoulder to shoulder. Another fifty yards and he had dropped again into his long striding walk; another fifty, and the run again.

And so we got to the other side of the meadow and the post-and-rail fence which encircles it.

Another vault. We were on grass still but now it was

trimmed, clipped grass, shaven as close as a dandy's nape. Again came the soft voice, pitched so that it would carry to my ear but no farther:

"Careful, now, careful!" We came onto a gravel path, crossed it, and were once more on grass.

We had to go more slowly now, threading our way between shrubs and flower beds. My mind was in such a turmoil; my body was so exercised in keeping up and keeping quiet that I doubt—I can't remember exactly—whether to wonder what we were doing crossed my mind.

Whether I wondered or not, I was soon to know. We came out, after making cautious way through a suddenly close shrubbery, onto a white path which I knew. The path which, from the eastern gate, leads direct to the stables. I remember that I marvelled at Gethryn's knowledge of the complicated geography of the grounds. We went on at a steady, soft-treading walk. I don't think that in a hundred and fifty yards I'd put my heels to the ground, rubber shod though I was, more than twice. Three times, though, I heard my own feet and my heart went into my mouth. Not once did the tall figure beside me make a sound.

We came at last to the archway which leads to the stable yard. Under the arch he halted. I stopped a foot from him. His hand came out in the darkness and grabbed my arm, pulling me nearer. He said, his voice now even lower:

"We're going in. I'm thinking of the kitchens. That's through here out at the other side of the yard, sharp right and sharp right again, isn't it?"

I pitched my voice to the same key as his. "Yes," I said.

"Know a better way?"

"No," I said.

His fingers let go of my arm. He said:

"Behind me now."

I kept behind him.

There was one awful moment in the journey. Turning the second sharp corner, making for the kitchens, my foot caught against a bucket. It fell and rolled. I don't think that ever in my life—not even on black Somme nights—has noise gone so near to shattering me. We halted. We pressed ourselves against the wall. I remember wishing that it would open up and receive me into its bricky bosom. I also remember thanking God, I believe audibly, that Grenville had hated dogs. We waited a minute; two minutes; three. We went on. At the first window, past the first of the kitchen doors, Gethryn halted. He was wearing no head covering and now he turned to me and whispered, "Your cap." I gave it to him. Using it as a cover, he flashed his torch up and down and round the window. He seemed satisfied. He handed me back the cap, put up the torch, and took something else from a pocket. There was a moment or two of fumbling and then, with a click, the window yielded. Inch by inch, faint squeak by faint rattle, he lowered the upper sash. When its top was level with the top of the lower, he put a knee on the sill and was gone. I followed.

The journey from the kitchens to the hall, the big square high place which I remembered so well and now so bitterly, was more nightmarish than anything yet in this nightmare night. We had to open at least six doors and each door had its own noise; noises which sounded in my overstrained ears as loud as heavy guns.

In the centre of the hall Gethryn stopped. He seemed to be taking his bearings. In a moment he was off again. We went half left. At the foot of the great staircase we turned left again. We began to mount the stairs. Those stairs are oak—probably the finest in England—but even

with the rubber-soled shoes it was hard not to make a sound. Again I heard my own feet, but never Gethryn's. We stopped at the top of the first flight. He turned to the left. I followed. He halted in his tracks. He said:

"Stay here. Hear anything, follow into that room."

He may have pointed. I couldn't see, but I knew the room he meant. The door was just opposite me. I'd never been up those stairs before, but I knew it was the room which had been Grenville's study. The door was shut. It seemed to me, waiting, straining my eyes and my ears and that other, "feeling" sense which one seems to develop in darkness, that he took an hour turning the handle. But at last, I knew, by the faintest of movements, that it was open.

And then I caught sight of a tiny speck of light. He was using the torch, covering it, I suppose, with his coat. . . .

And then—a sudden wild flurry of movement. . . . I don't suppose there was much noise—there can't have been—but to my straining ears the breaking of the silence was like bedlam.

I waited. Perhaps only for a second, perhaps for a little more. I felt, as they say in the best books, rooted to the spot. If I hadn't waited for that fraction of time, whatever it was, perhaps everything would have worked out to the same ends, but it would certainly have worked out differently. As it was, well . . . I heard a grunt. I heard hissing breaths. Two men's. . . .

I've never been noted for backwardness in getting into physical trouble. I took two steps and a jump and was inside. It was dark. It seemed darker even than the Stygian passage. I let out a sort of shouting whisper of, "Gethryn! Gethryn!"

And that's all I remember. There came a blaze like a firework going off inside my head.

(8)

I struggled up from the bottom. Stiff clay clogged my legs. The more I thrust with them, the more it seemed to drag. Clinging, slimy weeds roped themselves round my face and arms and body. My lungs were bursting.

I gave one terrific heave. . . . There was a little circle of light playing on my face and a voice quick and urgent. "Can you stand? No real damage. Crack on the head. Quick, man, quick!" I remember putting my hand up to my face. My cheek was wet, not with blood. For some stupid reason, I was crying; as easily as a kid, almost as unreasonably. My head sang and when I did stand, my legs sagged under me and I fell onto my knees. Hands came out; caught me under the armpits; hauled me up again. I felt better. An excruciating pain kept shooting from the back of my skull halfway down my spine, but things were clearer. I remembered. Again the voice, Gethryn's voice: "Catch on to me, quick, man, quick!" It was only a whisper but there must have been some quality in it of an urgency so desperate as to act like brandy. I made a wild clutch in the darkness. My fingers closed on the smooth cloth of a coat. I held on.

"Start away!" I said.

The urgency must indeed have been desperate. He was using the torch without disguise. We passed through the door. Halfway to the stairs I felt steadier. I let go. I said: "Quicker if you like." He raced silently down the flight and waited for me at the bottom. With every step, although the pain in my head and back increased, I was more able. I said so. He started off at a pace. I followed the dancing blob of light back over the way we'd come. All the doors we'd opened stood open still. I remember thinking—it's funny how little things strike one at a time like that—

that they were wider open than they had been. I remember wondering, as I chased down seemingly endless corridors after a bloodthirsty Tinker Bell, how on earth I was going to negotiate that climb through the window. But I didn't have to climb. Suddenly, as we reached the scullery in which the window was, Gethryn stopped. The torch flashed from window to door. It showed the door was open and widely open. He raced through it. No concealment now. Still he used the torch, and though he was outstepping me by one yard in ten I followed along. The edge of something hard caught my foot. There was a rolling, shattering, horrible clang. The same bucket. . . . It's silly how one gets at times like that. I remember stumbling and staggering on as fast as I could after the dancing light but being hindered in my speed because I was giggling. The bucket had suddenly struck me as funny. As I came out under the arch of the stable yard, I heard windows opening behind me and voices shouting. I ran on. . . .

It's no good asking me how I managed that quarter of a mile across country safe back to the car. I don't remember really. It's hardly possible for a man in my condition to have done it. But it was done. I'm not being heroic. I'm simply pointing out a rather interesting fact. I couldn't vault the gate this time, though. I climbed it slowly and painfully. The stabbing agony in my head and back, now that I'd stopped moving, was almost unbearable. I heard Gethryn start the car, and then the ticking of the big engine. I tried to shout something but couldn't. I was hanging over the gate like a wet sack. Suddenly two enormous staring shafts of light pierced the darkness like an insult. Incredible greens; astonishing black pits of shadow; twisting, snarling boles of trees looking like the work of a drunken genius of a scene painter, filled what had been an unguessable blank. The car began to move. I tried to shout

out. I remember cursing Gethryn in my mind. The car gathered way, passing me as I lay over my gate. I couldn't move. The pain was too bad, and lying as I was the taking of breath exhausted my ability. The scene, so violently lighted, was snapped back into nothingness as the lights travelled on. I must have gone off again, for the next thing I remember was opening my eyes to see the lights again, but this time facing the other way, back along the way we'd come. And then, an arm round my body and a voice in my ear. "Sorry, had to turn her. Come on."

Strength—enough strength, that is—came back to me. Half by my own force, half by his, I got off the gate. Took four steps and was at the car door. Somehow he got me into the seat beside the driver's.

The journey down that lane had been a nightmare. But it was nothing to the journey back, with lights, at a speed of something over fifty.

But I didn't seem to mind. The night air rushing against my face in a continuous wave, cold and yet soft, almost made me forget what I'd been through. Only every now and then did some particularly violent lurch send a pain down from the back of my poll to my waist to remind me.

We swung out onto the road and turned left. The pace increased and now the air against my face was a blasting roaring wind. But I liked it. I believe I even laughed. We passed the crossroads. We passed the church. Suddenly the driver relaxed and the lights went out. Instead of a white river of road stretching before us, there was blackness again. I felt Gethryn's body stiffen beside me as he thrust his foot on to the brake. The big car slackened, stopped. We were opposite Belton's house.

"Better stay put," said Gethryn, and was gone.

But I couldn't. It didn't occur to me then that I had a prisoner to look after. I half stepped, half fell out of the

car, clutched at the door, heaved myself upright and went pelting up the drive. I must have been faster than I thought. Gethryn was at the head of the steps by the front door. As I came to the bottom step, he turned, jumping down to land beside me with a soft flurry of gravel. He muttered something that I didn't catch. He left me and ran along the side of the house toward the French windows of the drawing room. I followed. He was unceremonious with the windows. They were locked. As I came up to them, he took three steps back, then one forward and a jump. His shoulder came against the wooden uprights between the panes. A splintering crash and he was gone. They stood open as I put my foot across the threshold. Lights sprang up. I put my hand up to my eyes. I'd been in the dark for so long that the light hurt. Once more I felt the red-hot stabbing pain from my scalp down to my waist. I rubbed my eyes. When I opened them, I shut them again. I couldn't believe what I saw. For a moment Gethryn, too, was amazed into stillness. I don't know whether he'd come to find Belton; but whether he had or not, Belton was there. He sprawled, an ugly gray splash upon the blue carpet. There was something sticking out of his back just below the left shoulder, and the shadow which this something made was too large.

Gethryn left the door. He came and stood over the thing.

I went closer too. The shadow was large because three quarters of it was stain. Dark stain looking black. It shone stickily in the bright light. I dropped on my knees and had a look. The man was very dead.

I didn't think. I didn't even try to. That was beyond me.

Gethryn moved. I looked up and followed him round the room with my eyes. In long strides he was back at the door again. There was a click and the lights went out.

"Come on!" he said.

I got to my feet. As I did, the door of the room opened. A high-pitched, quivering yet courageous feminine voice tore a thin way across the blackness. I don't know what it said to this day, but I remember that I was outside and running after the tall figure, which always seemed to be just ahead of me, when the lights went up again. I was only half in my seat when the car started with a jerk which nearly landed me in the road.

(9)

It might have been sleep, it might have been stupor, it might have been, I have frequently thought since, sheer terror added to exhaustion. Whatever it was, the beginning of that drive, which began in Retfordshire and ended sixty miles away, so completely paralyzed my mind as well as my body that I can't tell you anything of it; anything, that is, save the hungry roar—Gethryn must have opened the cut-out as we swung onto the north road—of our progress and the terrifying and perpetual onrush toward us of the road which continually leaped into white light under the headlights. There were towns that we passed. There were other cars every now and then which we passed. The red glow of other cars' rear lamps seemed to be rushing toward us like the road. . . .

I began to believe that all my life had been a dream and that this really was life. This searing rush through soft air which the wind of our own speed made. A cold and hard and living enemy. Whether Gethryn spoke on the first forty miles of that journey, I don't know. The first thing I remember hearing from him was a sound which reached my ears as a whisper. It said:

"Must have gone this way. *Must!*" And then he seemed

to slip back into the implacable, impersonal slave of this devil's machine which was standing still while the world roared past it. . . .

And I slept again. I must have, for I don't remember the car halting. All I remember is suddenly knowing that halt it had. An arm reached across me, brushing my knees. There was a click as the switch was turned and the lights went out. All of them. I peered about me in the darkness and saw that we were broadside across the road. I found afterward that it was the Great Road, but here it was so narrow that the long black car seemed to fill it; certainly blocked it against other traffic. I began to speak, but iron fingers suddenly dug themselves into my thigh and I was quiet again. The ghost of a whisper came to me out of the darkness.

"Didn't you see? . . . That last petrol station. Maxa. . . ."

I sat where I was. There was a soft click as the door opened. Gethryn was in the road. The night was lighter now. He moved and my eye caught the dull glitter from something he held in his hand. I twisted round in my seat and tried to look back. I could see nothing except formless shapes stretching on either side of the faintly defined roadway. . . .

I waited. . . .

And then—perhaps what breeze there was was coming toward us—my ears seemed to catch the faintest suggestion of a sound. Almost simultaneously there came to my eyes two round specks of light. . . .

The noise grew until it was a humming throb. . . . The lights grew until they were a blaze, until they were great eyes which a man could not look at for fear of his own. I was feeling sick and tired. I don't believe that I really knew whether I was alive. The roaring and the lights filled the air. They were close to us; they were upon us. . . .

Then an unearthly, wailing screech of brakes. . . . Then a shout. . . .

The roaring went on but the lights suddenly swung. They swung out to my left as I lay half twisted round in my seat. They showed suddenly, not the glittering road, but the high relief of a steep bank of raised earth with, beyond it, a black, untidy lake of shadow. . . .

Another shout. Some force, which didn't seem as if it came from inside me, got me out of that car. I think I'd one foot on the road when the sound of the crash came. A wild angry tearing sound which seemed to hang on the air long after it had really ended. A shapeless blob crowned the earthen bank. The great lights shot fan-shaped beams a quarter of a mile into the sky. I heard a voice calling. Gethryn's. I could see him. He stood at the foot of the bank just below the blob. I ran toward him. I joined him. We climbed together. . . .

The Maxa had turned completely over. She lay with her tail in the ditch and her head lights pointing to heaven. I heard Gethryn mutter:

"My *God!*"

He sat and swung his legs over into the ditch. He fumbled in his pocket and once more the beam of his torch flickered. I sat and wriggled along until I was beside him. We peered down into the shadow. . . .

In the shadow there, among the twisted mess of metal, I seemed to see something move. Slow, writhing sort of movement. I clutched his arm and pointed. I was going to speak but I didn't speak. . . .

## CHAPTER TWELVE

"THAT's right," said a voice, a fat and comfortable but completely unknown voice.

"You're *much* better, aren't you?" it said.

"Much better!"

The bed seemed a good bed. I'd been lying placidly on my back. I must have been awake for some minutes, but until the voice spoke my mind had been empty; just drifting along, occupied solely with wondering what my eyes would see when I took the trouble to lower their gaze from the white-washed ceiling and the upper half of an open window, pleasantly framing a bit of blue sky and the upper branches of an apple tree.

With the voice a governing cog wheel in my brain began once more to revolve, catching up in its teeth all its satellite wheels and bringing memory back in a hurried jumbled rush. I lowered my gaze and turned my head. My neck seemed very stiff. A sharp pain assailed my back. I grunted and looked. The owner of the voice was dressed in the starched white and blue—almost aggressively clean—which was the uniform of nurses in the Farningham Cottage Hospital. I began to speak but she checked me.

"Not now, don't you talk! Plenty of time for talking later. I'll get you your breakfast." She bustled out.

I put my hand up to my head, which felt odd and constricted. My fingers told me why. It was wrapped up, round and about, completely encased in bandages. I lay thinking. . . . Out of the jagged mass of memories one

stood out sharper than the others. . . . I was sitting beside Gethryn, peering down over a bank, following the thin pencil of light cast by his torch. . . . There was a great mass of something—it was a motor car—huddled and distorted, lying half on, half down the bank. . . . I was looking. . . . I saw something move. . . . I knew what it was—it was an arm and there was a hand at the end of that arm. And in the hand was something which shone dully in the torch-light. It was pointing straight at me. . . . Then—blankness. . . .

The nurse came back. She bore a tray upon which was a little blue bowl which steamed. She propped up the pillows and helped me to raise myself. She sat on the edge of the bed and put the bowl to my lips. I don't know what it was, but it didn't strike me as very pleasant. I could have done with three or four rashers of ham and three or four leashes or clutches, or whatever they call them, of eggs. I've always thought that a collection of eggs ought to be called a cluck. In between mouthfuls I pointed to the tray which was set down on the little table beside the bed. There was an envelope on it. A long buff envelope. I said:

"What's that?"

She looked down and muttered something, took the envelope off the tray and slipped it underneath the tray. She shook her head.

"Nothing. Don't you worry about that sort of thing to-day. Plenty of time for letters to-morrow."

"What's to-day?" I said.

"Now, don't you worry! You just drink this up."

I drank again. "But what *is* to-day?" I said once more.

"Friday," she said. "Friday."

I thought about that. It seemed to me that Friday had some particular association. With a confused rattling feeling which made my head ache, the thoughts inside it were

beginning to sort themselves into some sort of order. Friday? Friday? Why Friday?

The door opened and a head came in round it. "Nurse," it said—"Nurse, just a minute. Sister wants you."

She took the bowl from me and put it back on the tray. She said: "Now, you lie quiet. I'll be back in a minute."

She was gone with a crisp rustling of crisp linen.

Friday? Friday?

I gave it up. I began to test myself. I found that I could move quite easily. Move all myself—arms, legs, everything—and without any trouble except for one rather shocking twinge from the base of my skull down to my waist.

I leaned out of bed and stretched out my right arm. My fingers could just touch the edge of the envelope as it stuck out from under the tray. I twitched at it and it came away. An official-seeming envelope. I seemed quite recently to have received its twin brother. I had. When I opened it I found it was a notice served upon Michael Lawless of Little Thatches in the village of Samsford, Retfordshire, to attend at ten a. m. in the forenoon at the Shire Hall, Farningham, on the occasion of the resumption of the inquest upon the remains of the late Sir Charles Grenville, deceased. . . .

Now I knew why Friday had been troubling me. I looked round the room. I threw back the bedclothes and cautiously swung round and dropped my feet to the floor. I stood up. My knees felt pretty rocky, but I could walk. I walked across the room to a cupboard. I had been right. Inside the cupboard were my clothes. . . .

The old suit of tweed clothes I had put on because, I remembered, Gethryn had insisted upon something easy and something dark, was dust-stained and knocked about. There was a dark, hardening patch of some dark mess on

the right lapel. There was a jagged hole in the left elbow, and the knee of the left trouser was torn also, not in one big tear but a hundred little ones. Steadying myself with a hand against the wall—I found I could move quicker that way—I went to the window. I was lucky. The sill was not more than eighteen inches from the ground. Looking out I could see, to the left, the gates of the hospital. From those gates I knew it was no more than three hundred yards to the Shire Hall. I began, taking so much out of myself in my haste that I had to rest very frequently, to dress. All the time my ears were on the alert. I expected the fat nurse back at any moment and I knew what to expect if she found me.

(2)

If it had been my unlucky day the day before, to-day was compensation. No one saw me go, no one called after me. Pure luck! The three hundred yards took me nearer ten than five minutes. The streets weren't full, and there were only a few people to stare at me. None stopped me or said anything.

I got up the steps of the Shire Hall and through the main swing doors. I pushed open the green baize door to the right and showed my buff envelope and its contents to the warden at the door. He looked at me up and down. He seemed astonished. A stupid man. There was still silver in the pocket of the brown trousers and I fumbled and found two half-crowns. I pushed them into his hand and said:

"Get me a chair somewhere out of the way until I'm wanted. I'm not feeling very well."

The tip plus the document did the trick. Within two minutes and without attracting, so far as I could see, any attention whatsoever, I was seated. Seated not in the front

of the witness rows this time but at a spot perhaps ten yards farther back in the dark body of the hall; near where, that first time, Dinwater had sat between his two policemen. I sank onto the hard chair. I closed my eyes for a minute. I suppose the walk had taken more out of me than I thought. There was a kind of roaring sound in my ears, and I felt very much as though I'd like to be sick. It must have been some time before my head cleared sufficiently for me to open my eyes and begin properly to take in my surroundings and what was going on within them.

I couldn't see from where I was sitting anything of the body of the hall, except a few indistinguishable heads dotted about in the front seats where last time I myself had sat, but I could see—the light from the tall windows behind bathed the dais in a flood of light—the long trestle table, the same twelve bovine jurymen, the coroner still like a bad-tempered, under-fed thrush, and at the other end the witness chair, now empty.

The coroner, at his elbow a uniformed but helmetless policeman, was poring over a sheet of paper. I could tell by the cock of his head that he was angry and bewildered. He crumpled the paper up into a ball and muttered something to the policeman, who took himself off. . . .

"Call Anthony Ruthven Gethryn."

Quick long strides down the centre aisle, then Gethryn in the chair. The bandage I'd put round his head had been replaced by a tidy strip of plaster. He was in gray again and very smart. There was a blue cornflower in his buttonhole. He was pale, but I thought I could see on his face the beginnings of one of his crooked smiles. The coroner glared at him. The coroner said:

"You have given evidence here before, Colonel Gethryn, so I shall not trouble to go over the formalities with you.

I should like, however, to say, before anything else transpires, that I hope you will not waste the time of the court. In view of your last evidence and this note I have just received from you, I have no other course but to hear this 'very important statement' which you have to make, but if the request for immediate hearing had come in this way from most people I must say that I should have postponed the hearing until my own order of business had been put through. I'm saying this, Colonel Gethryn, because I want to impress upon you the necessity not to waste the time of the court. Will you please proceed now with this statement which you wish to make?"

Gethryn settled himself as comfortably as he might in that very uncomfortable chair. He hitched up his trousers, crossed one leg over the other, gave one glance round the hall—I wondered whether his eye had penetrated to my dark corner—and began.

"You won't find, sir," he said, "that I shall waste the time of the court. The statement which I wish to make is this: I have ascertained beyond doubt the persons responsible for the murder of Sir Charles Grenville. . . ."

The twelve moonlike faces of the jurymen—six upon each side of the table—came round as one to gape at the placid utterer of this remark. The coroner jerked himself about in his chair. His pince-nez slipped off and with a flurried grab he caught them. He rammed them back onto his nose. He said:

"I *beg*—your—pardon! May I ask whether you have informed the police of this—of this—of this—— Never mind! Go on, go on!"

"I have not officially informed the police because I've not had time. This is not a serious omission because both the persons directly concerned with the killing are not liable to arrest. . . ."

The coroner interrupted. He spluttered: "Not liable to —not liable to—what——"

"They are both dead. They were Guy Francis Belton, otherwise George Frederick Brasil, otherwise Gerald F. Branscombe, and Earl James Aviss, otherwise Edward J. Attimore or William Guffy."

I suppose there was a noise in court and a stir. I do seem to remember hearing the coroner thrash the table with his gavel, but at the time I was only conscious of my own astonishment. Belton *and* Aviss! It was the *and* which got me. I couldn't disbelieve, I didn't disbelieve. In a way, even to my tired and battered mind, it all fitted. Except that *and.* Aviss *and* Belton! . . .

He had said that they were both dead. Well, I had seen Belton dead myself, but Aviss—Aviss, who had rung up from town only just before we started out on that nightmare evening—Aviss? I buried my head in my hands for a moment and fought away the black cloud which once more threatened to envelop me. Once more I beat it.

The film went from my ears. . . . Gethryn was speaking.

". . . motor accident," he was saying, "at a point about five miles north of Beldrick on the Great Road. It may or may not have been reported to you. I myself arranged for the removal of the body to Beldrick Mortuary. That was Aviss. . . ."

Good God! Then it was Aviss's arm and Aviss's hand! It was Aviss who had shot me. But Aviss had rung up from London. . . . I drove my own thoughts away and listened again.

Gethryn had paused. The coroner was speaking. His attitude was that of a bewildered and perhaps rather frightened child who realizes that what he has done is not so clever as he had thought. There was no sound in the great hall. The coroner was saying:

". . . astounding! Please continue, Colonel Gethryn. Please continue!"

Gethryn shifted a little in his chair, the shifting of a man who knows that he is going to be in one place for a long time. He said:

"I think, Mr. Coroner, that it would be as well if I began at the beginning. This was a complicated intrigue. If I say what I have to say patchily, I shall only succeed in confusing both the court and myself. . . . Very well then: You will remember that when I sat last in this chair, I explained how it was that I had come to the certain belief that Dinwater was not guilty of the shooting but that a careful plot had made it seem superficially as if he were. I told you how, having found those traces of silver sand, I deduced that Grenville was not killed where he was found by Welby, but at a spot nearly a quarter of a mile away—a hidden clearing in the thickest part of the northeast copse called locally, I believe, the Dell. I then, as you know, found the bullet which I deduced had been that which killed Grenville.

"At this stage I was, of course, quite in the dark as to who it was who had endeavoured to make a scapegoat of Dinwater.

"My next point was the silencer. As a matter of fact I had cleared this up and was ready to explain it when I last sat here, but didn't get the chance; the court was adjourned. This silencer, you will remember, was part of the case against Dinwater. If Dinwater had fired the shot he must, for his own safety's sake, have silenced it. An Ellery silencer—the only type, I believe, which it is possible to obtain for the kind of rifle used—was found buried in a muck heap on The Moon premises. I saw at once that the existence of this silencer would be an even greater point in my case than it was in the case against Dinwater. If

there was a silencer and it was not in effect Dinwater's and yet was 'planted' on Dinwater, that silencer *must*—the probability is so great as to make itself into a certainty—have been the property of the 'planters,' who were also, again a probability-certainty, the real murderers. They too would have a very good use for a silencer. And I think I can satisfy you that they used the same silencer. There are three shops in London at which Ellery silencers for the type of rifle in question can be purchased. I visited on Monday last each of these. Two did not keep and never had kept Ellery silencers in stock; they had to order them specially. Neither had sold an Ellery silencer for the past two years. In each case, also, they had records of the persons to whom these silencers had been sold. Both these persons were resident in London; both were enthusiastic shots with small private practice ranges. Both, I ascertained over the telephone, still had their silencers and in regular use. The third shop kept Ellery silencers in stock. Also, they had very fortunately kept a record of the persons to whom these silencers were sold, in the same way that they kept records of the persons to whom guns were sold. They had sold one Ellery silencer within the last year, and that one had been purchased at the beginning of this summer by a man who called himself Jones. I could get no description of this man because the assistant who had carried through the deal was no longer in the firm's employ, but the records show that this Jones stated himself to be in the employ of Mr. Alfred Dinwater of Samsford, and was purchasing a silencer on Mr. Dinwater's behalf. The firm had to send back to their works for a silencer and Jones couldn't wait. He paid the money for it, however, and asked that the silencer should be sent to Mr. Alfred Dinwater, in care of the Chinningford post office.

Chinningford, as you probably know, is a small market town about twenty miles up the Great Road.

"I went to the post office at Chinningford. Post offices aren't very kind to unaccredited enquirers, but I managed to induce a memory of this particular parcel. It had aroused curiosity by reason of its shape and the time it had remained unclaimed. It arrived at the Chinningford post office near the beginning of May. It was claimed—I couldn't get any information as to the appearance of the claimer except that he was a 'slim gentleman' with an American accent—on the twenty-first of June. I had just come from the post office at Chinningford when I arrived in this court on Tuesday morning.

"You will see, gentlemen, that this was a considerable step up in the case I was preparing. We have again probability-certainties, this time to the effect that there was only one silencer; that this silencer was not purchased by Dinwater; that this silencer was the silencer used on the rifle which really *did* kill Grenville; that this silencer, upon Friday the 18th of August, *after* the killing, was planted in its unpleasant hiding-place.

"Now, as I shall explain further later, I was already convinced that this business was an American business. And here was more Americana: I had a slim American calling for this silencer, and I had a fat American—Aviss—and this fat American was on The Moon premises from nine o'clock on that Friday evening until at least ten-thirty. Now it is safe to assume that Aviss, who was noted for the quantity of beer which he drank, did not remain throughout that entire time actually within the inn. He would have at least one chance—and excuse—to give himself time to plant the silencer—the work of thirty seconds at the most. Belton could not have done it: he was, in fact,

elsewhere. It is improbable that anyone else did it. Aviss was the man who knew The Moon. There is evidence and to spare to show that perpetually, not only during this summer but during the other summers that he had also spent in Samsford, he used this public house a very great deal. He knew not only that he could plant the silencer, but he also knew so well—and this is very important—Dinwater's habits, that he could be sure that unless anything very exceptional were, from his point of view, to go wrong that evening, Dinwater, by leaving the bar as he always did, would complete the case against himself by being alone for long enough to have committed the crime which was to be placed at his door. . . .

"But I'm afraid I've had to break a little the chronological continuity of my case. I'll try and get back to it. . . .

"I said just now that I very early became convinced that there was an American background to this crime. I became so convinced like this: I asked myself, 'Why was Dinwater chosen as a scapegoat?' It couldn't have been merely for convenience. There was a rifle club in Samsford. There were thirty members of this rifle club. There must have been members of this rifle club—there are, in fact, but I don't think we need go into petty scandal—to whom a motive for killing Grenville could be attributed. It was most unlikely that Dinwater should kill Sir Charles; except for that overheard quarrel between Dinwater and Grenville—which it is most unlikely, again, that anyone else could have heard of—there would be no publicly acceptable reason for Dinwater's wishing to kill Grenville, the owner of the hand which fed him. And yet Dinwater was chosen. Why?

"There is only one answer. Because Dinwater's death—though not so desirable as Grenville's—would be at least useful.

"Now, what could be the circumstances which would so knit together the erstwhile servant and his master as to make them the joint victims of a murder plot? I examined what I knew of Grenville's life. Public school; university; good regiment; war; bit of society. That covers the period from birth to the beginning of the year 1920. Dinwater impinges on that life at over halfway through it. In 1915 he becomes batman to Grenville. He stays with Grenville after the war as a servant. In 1920 he goes with Grenville to the United States. When he comes back six years later he is no longer a servant but is made the landlord of one of the brewery's public houses and is even promised something better. This makes it inferable that he was more than an ordinary servant during those years in the States. What did he do in the States? What was Grenville doing in the States? Nobody knows. The six years in America form the one occult period in Grenville's life. The link, therefore, between Dinwater and Grenville, the link which would give them a common enemy, must be America.

"Now the evidence of Marsh, the under-keeper. Marsh, you will remember, overheard a quarrel between Dinwater and Grenville. There were used many words he didn't understand. He didn't think they were in a foreign language; he didn't think they were obscene words or blasphemous. The only ones he could give any shape to, and he didn't think he had that shape quite right, were 'Jack' or 'Jacko,' and 'Blanking fear.' 'Jack' or 'Jacko,' I realized —I shall support my realization and make it proof later— was Hi-jacker. 'Blanking fear'—he didn't make such a good shot that time—was Racketeer. Both these words are current Americanese for differing types of blackguard. . . . You see, we are getting more and more Americana.

"The next thing to look for was an American or Americans in the district. They leaped to the eye, they were not hidden. They didn't try to hide. There was one ostensibly real American—Aviss—and one ostensibly real Canadian with the reputation, circulated even by himself, of having spent several years in America. That was Belton. Aviss and Belton, it was common gossip, were so inimical as to provide a constant source of talk in Samsford. Where Aviss went, Belton didn't, and vice versa. People who tried asking them together soon got rid of the habit. People who were acquainted with both got to learn that they mustn't to either even so much as mention the name of the other. Therefore, it seemed that in searching for the hidden American hand in the Grenville case, one must choose between Belton and Aviss. The choice was easy: Belton. Belton was a constant visitor at the Hall. Belton was known to be, if not an intimate friend, at least a very close personal acquaintance of the murdered man's. Belton was the name, you will remember, which so annoyed Grenville at the luncheon party upon the day of his death.

"Assuming Belton, how did he work? I'm dealing now not with motive, but merely with the crime itself. How did he work? Lady Grenville's maid, in her evidence, stated that Sir Charles, during the small scene which he had with Lady Grenville before he went out on the night of his death, intimated—suggested, at least—that his going out and the possibility of his being late were due to Dinwater. But *we* know Dinwater had nothing to do with this crime. Yet Sir Charles thought he was going to meet Dinwater. Why? He must have had—I have no proof of this[1]—a message, perhaps a note, more probably a telephone message as from Dinwater but in reality from Bel-

[1]Miss Gilchrist, the reader will remember, was promised that she should not get into trouble.—M. L.

ton, giving urgent reasons—urgent *American* reasons—why Sir Charles should meet him that night, and meet him in the northeast copse. They had probably met there before. Equally probably they had been spied upon at one of those meetings, so that the meeting place was known to Belton.

"We are now up to the point of the murder itself. I needn't, I'm sure, go over the whole ground of my previous evidence. What happened was that Grenville was sandbagged, then rammed upright between the two trees, and shot. Who did this? The time when all this had been done —as I shall explain presently—was not later than 7:05. Welby found the body at the foot of the steps, three hundred yards or more of difficult travelling away from the Dell, at 9:50. Witnesses who passed over the right-of-way and the steps at approximately 8:50 can swear that there was no body there at that time. The body therefore must have been placed at the foot of the steps after 8:50 and before 9:50. It is probable—in fact, I *know*—that the body was hidden twice.[1] First in the Dell from 7:05 to approximately 8:10 and then, after transit, to a spot somewhere about that from which Marsh listened to the quarrel between his employer and Dinwater—that is the fringe of the little copse at the top of the steep bank just facing the steps of the right-of-way. This work must have been finished—it had to be finished to fit in with a certain time-table which I shall describe to you at the proper time—by about twenty minutes past eight. The witnesses who used the right-of-way and crossed over the steps at 8:50 saw no body. Therefore, as the body was at the foot of the steps at 9:50 it must have been moved down the bank and laid in the position in which it was found at some time within that hour and thirty minutes.

---

[1]Wait for Harris.—M. L.

"For the sake of brevity, gentlemen, I'm afraid that I have been mixing deduction with established fact; except for the actual times, I deduced this scheme of operations and subsequently received proof to lock the deduction. I am now going back to deduction solely.

"This murder and the disposal of the body, you will appreciate at once, could not have been the work of one man. Two at least must have been necessary. I had one 'possible' in Belton—who was the other? It was at this stage that I gave myself—by means of the reasoning which I used just now in connection with the planting of the silencer and Aviss's knowledge of The Moon and Dinwater's habits—the answer of Aviss. But Aviss and Belton were enemies! I gathered what details I could of their enmity and examined them. I came to the conclusion that they were *too* inimical. They took *such* trouble to be enemies. They were at enormous pains to let everyone know that enemies they were. They spent so much time, I thought, publicly hating each other, that very likely in private they were closer than brothers. Statements like that, I'm afraid, sound wild in this solemn atmosphere, but I assure you that they aren't. All of us, even the most prosaic, use the phrase, and mean it—'too good to be true.' Apply this, and you will see that my inference from the enmity of the two men was not merely lucky in turning out correct. There is only one other point left in connection with the actual killing. That is, which of the two, Aviss or Belton, actually fired the shot which killed Grenville? They are both dead. They would both have been hanged. The question therefore is not of more than scholastic importance. I will only give it as my considered opinion—there is no way of definitely finding out[1]—that the

[1]Even Harris didn't know.—M. L.

sand-bagging was done by Aviss and the shooting by Belton.

"Belton, you will hear in Samsford, was a bad shot. I enquired into the badness of his shooting and found that it was so consistently bad and laughably bad that, applying the same form of inference as I mentioned just now, I thought it too bad to be true. . . .

"An interesting point arises here. The Samsford Rook Rifle Club was formed two summers ago. The prime movers in the scheme were a lady resident of the district and Guy Belton. There is no doubt in my mind that, whatever the lady resident may think, the real inspiration came from Belton. I believe, and I can support it to a certain extent by outside evidence which you will get later, that as long as two years ago the possible blotting-out of Grenville was considered. One of Grenville's ill-wishers was a crack shot. Wouldn't it be a good thing to cloud the neighbourhood with possible shooters, at the same time establishing the crack shot's complete inability to hit a policeman at three feet? That, of course, was before they had worked out the possibility of involving and getting rid of Dinwater. . . . But to get back:

"We have Aviss and Belton as joint criminals, so now we must see how they managed to be joint criminals. Both had the most excellent alibis. Belton, in fact, actually gave his to the police after the last sitting of this court; when I believe that some of my evidence led the authorities to enquire into his behaviour on Friday night. Aviss was never called upon to give his, but he gave it. He wrapped it up nicely in the very best sugar syrup and gave it to me. It was very good; not quite so cast-iron as the one that he and Belton had prepared for Belton, but good enough. One must remember that, from their point of view, if their frame-up on Dinwater did go wrong, the first suspect would

be Belton. Therefore, logically, he had to have the better alibi of the two. I have written out these two alibis. I have also written out a time-table of what the *actual* movements were. I have all three with me. I propose, Mr. Coroner, to hand them to you so that you and the jury can examine them. Before I do so, however, I'm afraid I must let off another squib.

"There was a third man concerned! He was not concerned in the actual murder, but he was essential to the formation of the alibis. He was more than this: the body of Grenville couldn't be moved from the second hiding-place (that is, the copse facing the steps) until a time when both Aviss and Belton could be, and actually were, elsewhere. The third man, therefore, had to move it. . . . Yes, Mr. Coroner, I can see what you're about to ask me. You needn't be concerned. I can and have informed the police—as a matter of fact, just before the opening of this court this morning—how this man may be got hold of. Here are the three sheets I was talking about. . . . If I hand them to you, sir, perhaps you'll pass them along to the coroner."[1]

(3)

The Coroner, at his third rapping, managed to silence the hall. The three sheets which Gethryn had handed up were back again at the head of the table, neatly stacked upon the rest of the coroner's papers. He leaned his arms upon those papers and bent forward. He said, in a voice from which everything but a rather unpleasant respect had oozed:

"Colonel Gethryn, perhaps you would continue. I can assure you that you will have the completely undivided attention of the court."

[1]See Appendix A.

Gethryn stiffened a bit at that. But he went on. He said:

"I have confined myself so far to hows. It is time we got to why. Motive. Very well: As soon as I was really satisfied that this was a crime arising out of illegal activities in America, I got into touch with some very good friends of mine who have means of obtaining such information as was necessary. I don't mean, of course, that I knew they could get the information, but that, if anyone could, they could.

"I asked for anything they knew about Grenville himself while he was in the United States—this includes Dinwater, of course. I asked for anything they knew about Belton while he was in the United States. I asked for anything they knew about Aviss.[1]

"I learned this: that Grenville, for those six American years, had been—well, I don't think I need go into it here, beyond saying that he had been connected with bootlegging on a large scale. Dinwater was his lieutenant. In course of time Grenville's activities brought him into direct conflict with a big Chicago gang controlled by a man named Guffy—William Guffy. However, Grenville was more successful than Guffy. The Guffy gang did not actually peter out, but its activities became limited. The Grenville lot stole much of their business. When Grenville returned to England, on the death of the last baronet, to take over the title and the estate, he had made, I suppose, upward of five million dollars out of his—er—activities. This is a sizable sum of money. Much of this, Guffy considered, should have been his. He and his lieutenant,

[1]Note again the saving of Miss Gilchrist. What really gave Pike the handle for the information which he had given Gethryn on the Wednesday morning was "Guffy." They had some without that, of course, but Guffy proved the missing bit of the jig-saw, as far as S. Y. were concerned, and Guffy, the reader will remember, first came to Gethryn's notice through Miss Gilchrist. Things would have worked out the same without Guffy, of course, but not so neatly.—M. L.

Brasil, having heard that Gerald (I should say here, by the way, that in the States Grenville went by the name of Gerald) that Gerald was now what they no doubt called a lord, saw possibilities for both revenge and easy money. And all set in the pleasant surroundings of an English holiday. They were not, these two—I need not remind you that Guffy was Aviss, and Brasil, Belton—they were not the ordinary type of gangster; at least, not the type of gangster that this country has become familiar with from cinematograph films. They were both, Belton particularly, presentable persons. They both had money, but not of course as much as they wanted. They came to England; they came to Samsford—separately. They were a rich Canadian and an even richer American holidaying in England; Belton because of social ambition; Aviss for beer and a rustic life.

"Now, as you will see in due course, there was a peculiarity about the Guffy gang. Although Guffy's name was known, his person wasn't. This may sound incredible to you, gentlemen, but I can assure you, even from my own slight knowledge of the United States, that it is not only possible but likely. Guffy, like many another rich man, both in America and all over the world, was respectable on the surface. The Guffy gang was run by Belton, and very well run. Belton, in other words, was the executive, Aviss the brains. And so it was in Samsford. Belton, you will observe, knew personally and was known personally to Grenville. There was nothing in Grenville's mind or Aviss's behaviour—they hardly, if ever, met—to connect Aviss with Guffy. Aviss was just an American coincidence. But Belton—Brasil—was another matter. Belton went to the Hall. Belton was Belton in public. Belton in private was Brasil. As Brasil he told Grenville what he had come for, not, of course, mentioning Aviss-Guffy. Never mentioning

Aviss-Guffy; except to say that he was acting upon Guffy's instructions from America. What he wanted, and what he got, was money. The threat he used to extort money—some day, I should think soon, it will be found how much he did extract over the three summers during which the blackmail continued—is obvious. Sir Charles Grenville, Baronet, would hardly like it known, in the right (or wrong) quarters, that the money with which he had returned to England, and which he was spending so rightly and properly as an English country gentleman, had been made in the way it had been. Possibly, also, there were other and even stronger inducements; other pages in Grenville's life. That can be left to conjecture. It is, anyhow, immaterial. The material thing is the blackmail itself.

"This blackmail, as I have said, went on for two summers; possibly it was dropped on the necessary winter return to the States of Aviss and Belton; possibly not. But in any event why should its authors suddenly terminate it themselves by the slaughter of the gold-laying goose? I think there is only one answer. Grenville, whatever else he may have been, was a strong man. Only really strong inducements would move him to submit to blackmail, and even these, when the blackmail grew to such a pitch that it began seriously to affect his finances, he would rebel against. He must have rebelled, and Aviss—always the brains of the enemy—must have seen that this rebellion was real. What to do? Answer: Get rid of the goose, making it lay by its death one last and noteworthy golden egg.

"A man in Grenville's circumstances cannot reasonably be expected to leave money to anyone connected with the men who have been bleeding him, so that there could come no direct benefit from killing him. What was the indirect benefit? I guessed, when I first got to this stage in my thinking, that Grenville was still associated—however

much his association was camouflaged—with what had once been his personal gang, and that, therefore, by his death, Aviss and Belton would not only get rid of a source of potential danger to them—after all, a rebellious blackmailee *is* dangerous, at all events to his blackmailers—but would also, if they played their cards properly, be able to assimilate the leaderless Grenville lot with their own, making the Guffy brigade once more supreme, even stronger, perhaps, than it had ever been. I now have proof that I was right in this guess; proof which I will come to in a moment. But the concrete basis for this proof—a sheet of paper which you shall see—was also so closely connected with the death of Belton that I had better say now what I have to about that.

"As you know, Mr. Coroner, you will, in a few days, be holding an inquest on the body of Belton. I suppose that I shall have to give formed evidence then; but I have to say, now, that there is proof that Belton was killed by Aviss.

"What happened was this: I deliberately impressed upon Aviss the fact that I was suspecting Belton. I even went so far as to plant just a seed of doubt in his own mind as to whether I didn't suspect him as well; as to whether I wasn't 'on to,' as he would have said himself, that fake enmity of theirs. I did this to force his hand, to make him hurry. He did hurry. On Wednesday night he had a row with Belton. Belton, who had more courage than brains, wanted to stick the thing out, being confident in their alibis, until they could get hold, apparently legitimately, of the one thing they wanted to make their success complete. That thing was—just as it might be in a sensational novel—a 'paper.' Just one. I have it here and will now hand it formally into court. It's a copy of a long cable, in code, from New York. The code was simple. I have decoded the message on the sheet at the back. The cable con-

tains suggested and perfected plans for a new series of operations in three big American cities; operations which are all on the racketeering principle. The word 'racketeer' is used a lot in that cable. If you don't know it already, the rest of the message will give you its meaning.

"With this, which he knew existed, but the details of which he didn't know, Aviss-Guffy would be in a complete position to assimilate the Grenville gang. He would, you see, know not only what they intended to do but what they had done, and with that lever, plus the death of Grenville, could get them easily enough.

"Back to the quarrel between Aviss and Belton. Belton wants to stay. Aviss, the better brain, says that to stay is dangerous. He wants to get out and get out quick. The original idea, I think, had been that Belton, by slow and gradual and perfectly aboveboard-seeming approach, should get at least a copy of this code-cable from Lady Grenville, who, of course, would know nothing of its import, as she had known nothing of her husband's American interests. Belton wants to stick to that idea. Aviss won't stick to that idea. They quarrel; so bitterly that Belton threatens not only to withdraw his support but perhaps even to blow the gaff. So Aviss, in a hurry but thorough always, eliminates him. He has made all his own arrangements for getting out of the country. He waits until—on Wednesday night—he has been to the Hall, broken in and obtained what he wants, and then he makes a final appeal to Belton—not, however, telling him that he already has what they want. Nothing doing; Belton refuses, so out goes Belton. Using Belton's car, which is faster than his own, Aviss sets off for the North and his pre-arranged transatlantic transport. Thirty miles up the Great Road he stops for petrol. Five miles farther on he sees an obstruction in the road. He is going very fast. He turns his car, gets

into a dry skid and mounts the bank. The car overturns, and within quarter of an hour he is dead himself, having immediately, before he died, attempted yet one more murder. . . . Rather, I think, a magnificent rogue. The copy of the cablegram which you have just received was in his pocket. . . . I must apologize for keeping the court so long. I need keep it no longer."

For an appreciative time there was no sound in the hall, and then, with a little gasp, voices began. But even now there was no babel. The coroner didn't even rap. He sat, his birdlike head thrust forward, staring at Gethryn. And Gethryn now was looking about him as if for a way of escape.

The coroner pulled himself together. He strove to show, and succeeded, that he at least was under no spell; that he had not only taken in all that he had heard, but had fastened upon the points. An unpleasant and cocksure little man, but able. He said:

"Colonel Gethryn, you have several times in the course of that most interesting, that extraordinarily closely reasoned and, if I may say so, vitally impressive exposition" —Gethryn began to writhe, almost visibly—"several times, Colonel Gethryn, you have mentioned corroborative proof to come——"

Gethryn cut him short. "Yes," he said. "If you would have called to this chair Frederick Roosevelt Harris, the proofs I've mentioned can be got from him. He is in court. He has acted for this past summer as parlourman and valet to Belton. He is known to the police in America and, by repute only, to the police in this country. Perhaps I should tell you, Mr. Coroner, that I think it highly unlikely that you will get him to make a statement. I think it equally likely that he *will* answer questions. If I may leave the stand now——"

"Certainly, Colonel. Certainly! I cannot find words to express——"

"Please don't," said Gethryn.

"Very well." The coroner bowed with a jerky little movement of his head. "Call Frederick Roosevelt Harris."

I was beginning, now that the tenseness of interest had momentarily waned, to feel odd again. I didn't see where they came from, but I did see, just at the foot of the dais, two men. One was Gethryn's servant, White—the man who (it seemed at least months ago but was really only a few days) had puzzled me with his asking for silver sand. The other was Belton's servant. He looked very different now. He was in borrowed clothes, far too large for him. He was no longer the dapper, blank-faced nonentity I remembered. His blond hair was tousled; a day's growth of blond beard blurred the outlines of his face, and the face itself seemed different. I suppose it was because he was not acting now. From somewhere he must have got some chewing gum; his jaws worked incessantly. He walked with a swinging, catlike slouch. He went up the steps of the dais, looked impudently around, and settled himself in the chair.

The coroner barked at him: "Your name is Frederick Roosevelt Harris?"

"'S'right, boss. If de gents say so, dat's it. Dey call me Slim."

"You have heard the evidence of the last witness?"

"I listened to de gent's spiel. Hot guy, dat!"

"No remarks, Harris! Answer questions!"

"Sure!"

"Silence! You heard the evidence of the last witness, Colonel Gethryn?"

"Yep."

"Have you anything to say before I begin to ask you

questions, point by point, in general disagreement with what Colonel Gethryn has told the court?"

"Shoot again, boss?"

"Do you or do you not agree with what Colonel Gethryn has told us about these men Aviss and Belton?"

"Sure! Dat's right enough what de gent said. Hot guy, dat! Glad he's not a cop over de udder side!"

"Silence!!"

"Sure! Apolajoses!"

D'you know, I began rather to like Slim Harris. It's a weakness with me, always to like people who don't give a damn. I laughed at Slim Harris; not aloud, but laughed. . . .

It was funny, but that laugh finished me. . . .

The blackness came again. . . . The next thing I knew was a hand on my shoulder and a misty face—Gethryn's—looking down on me. He was saying:

"You silly damn fool!" . . . and then blackness again. And the next thing was the hospital. Another room. Not on the ground floor.

I was in bed and felt all right again. Quite all right. I should have liked to get up. Gethryn was talking to a short, fat little man in a black coat and sponge-bag trousers—obviously a doctor. The doctor went out. Gethryn came over to the bed. I grinned.

"I agree," I said, "with Slim Harris. Certainly you're a hot guy!"

He said:

"What did you come *for*, you fool?"

I went on grinning. "Not such a hot guy after all! Where's the Great Detective? Don't you see, Watson, that I'd been out for over twenty-four hours? I didn't know anything, and when I remembered—they let me have my calling-up notice by mistake—and when I

remembered, all I remembered was that the inquest was on again and that—and that——"

I stopped grinning. I remembered that Sheila was . . . that Sheila was . . . that Sheila had told me that she didn't want to see me any more.

Gethryn sat on the edge of the bed. He smiled and said:

"I saw Lady Grenville just now. She wants to see you. . . . No, not to-day. That's more than I could make the saw-bones agree to. But to-morrow, if you're good."

My heart gave a great leap. . . .

He got up to go, but I called him back. Somehow, after what he'd just said, I was frightened to be left alone. I suppose I didn't want time to think what Sheila's message might *not* mean. I said:

"Look here! There's a lot of things I want to know. A hell of a lot of things! There's a lot of jagged ends and snippetty bits you didn't get into the little chat with the coroner. . . . Oh, I know why you left most of 'em out. Very tactful. But I want to know and I'm going to know! You sit down!"

He stood looking at me. He shook his head and smiled.

"Wait," he said. "Wait. Let Baby get a little stronger. Be good, now!"

The door clicked to behind him.[1]

(4)

I knew I wasn't asleep. I knew, I suppose, that I was alive. I said those things. I said:

---

[1]My desire for all this information waned for a time. You can imagine why. It was six months later before it flamed again. I got the information. Gethryn was away. He and his wife were in Norway, but I wrote all the things down in a sort of questionnaire which I posted off to him with a letter. The answer to that letter can be found by any reader sufficiently interested to look for it, as Appendix B to this book.

"I know I'm not asleep because no dream could be as marvellous as this. But I only think I'm alive. Perhaps I don't even think that. Perhaps I'm dead But if I am dead, then they told me all wrong, because I can't see any wings."

She was in black. She sat on the little room's one hard chair. The chair—I bought that chair when I left the place—was touching the edge of my bed. Resting on my hand was her hand. It was cool and beautiful and strong in the way some flowers are strong. For a moment her head was down-bent so that I couldn't see her eyes any more. I moved my head, trying to twist it so that I could see her eyes. I didn't like not seeing them. I must have twisted just half an inch too much; the pain—it was as if someone had driven a white-hot bayonet into the base of my skull—made me gasp. . . .

The eyes came back again. Below them the lovely mouth spoke.

"Poor head!" it said. The hand left mine and went to the bandages which were round my head. I could feel that touch through them. I tried to say something—as if there were anything left to say, after all that we had said!—but I didn't seem able to speak. . . .

And then, suddenly, she was on the chair no longer. She was on her knees beside the bed and her arms were round me, the cool, long-fingered hands clutching my shoulders. I caught one more glimpse of the eyes before her face was hidden, hidden against my shoulder. Their soft grayness, which somehow was always more suggestive of colour than any colour could be, was covered with a glittering sheen. Against my body I could feel her shaking to sobs. I was desperate. I felt I wanted to get up and take hold of the world and tear great holes in it with my hands.

I put my right arm about her shoulders and held her. I said:

"Don't! Dearest, don't! Please don't! . . . Why? . . . Why?"

The shaking of her body grew less; ceased. She drew herself away. Once more she sat on the chair. Once more I felt her hands—both of them this time—on mine. Tears make some women ugly, but her tears had made her, to me at least, seem twice as beautiful. Only that's not possible. . . .

There came an odd, most deliciously self-mocking little toss of her head. She looked at me almost defiantly. She said:

"I'm sorry! I'm a fool!"

I said again:

"Why? Why did you? What was the matter?"

Again the little movement of her head.

"I'm a fool . . . because all that's over now. Over for always. But I don't know how I did it. I don't!"

"What?" I said. "In God's name, what?"

She smiled at me. "Dear, don't look like that! It was only . . . I was just remembering . . . all those terrible days. . . . Doesn't it seem like years ago? . . . What I was being a fool about was how I felt when I had to be . . . when I had to pretend that I didn't want you. I know it was right; I told Colonel Gethryn when he came that Saturday that I knew it was right, and I promised him."

I stared. "Gethryn? Gethryn? What's he got to do with——? What the devil——?"

"Be quiet, dear, or I won't tell you. It was only—well, Colonel Gethryn seemed to know or guess something about us. How he could have I can't imagine. I'm not sure —well, I s'pose I am—that I was myself. . . . Sure, I mean.

But anyhow he explained. He knew, he said, that you had had nothing to do with . . . with . . . with . . . Charles being killed. But he told me that that evening you'd done just what I did; gone away to be by yourself and think. (What were you thinking of, dear? Never mind, don't tell me. You might say it wasn't me, and I couldn't bear that.) He told me all about what you'd done—the gun and everything—and how bad it might look for you, and he said it would be wiser for me not to show anyone . . . to try, even, for the sake of good acting, to keep it even from myself that . . . I was . . . well, even friendlily interested in you. He was wonderful about it. I can't imagine how, as a stranger, he managed to do it so that I didn't think him merely impertinent. And then, when I told him about me, that I'd done what you had—gone away somewhere by myself . . . you know what I was thinking about; I was thinking about it so much that although I'd half-promised to, I wasn't going to see you. When I told him that, he said it simply made things worse. More than ever I must pretend. And I did. And I hated it. God! How I hated it. And I hated it more than ever because he explained that no one must tell you *why* I was . . . was vile to you; because if they did, then you'd only spoil everything."

We looked at each other. She said:

"Dear, I must go now. Only for a little while." And then she suddenly smiled. "Think what they'll think of me! What do you think of me?"

I said, after I had told her:

"Rather a terrible question now. Did you ever love Grenville?"

She looked at me for a long moment without speaking. I couldn't read her eyes. I waited. I don't think I breathed. Then, at last, she shook her head slowly.

"Never. I thought perhaps—I was very young—I

thought perhaps I might, you know, after. But I never did. I never even got to know him. Funny thing to say, that, isn't it? But I didn't. And I'm glad!" The soft voice was defiant. "Glad, I said. And I'm glad too that I married him. I loathed it. I loathed it! So much that the day before he was . . . was killed, I'd made up my mind . . . whether, my darling, you ever came to anything or not . . . I'd made up my mind not to go on living with him. And I'd told him. He couldn't—wouldn't believe." Her eyes were turned from mine now, staring sightlessly into distasteful memory. "Wouldn't believe," she repeated slowly, "wouldn't believe. . . . And then—dear, I must tell *you*—and then, on the day, I . . . I . . . he . . . said that he wasn't going to believe; that he'd *make* me see that I loved him. . . . He was vile. . . . He said all this with other people—guests—where they might easily have heard. And I said: 'If you even *try* . . . I'll *kill* you!' " Her eyes were again upon mine: they were wide and horror-stricken. She shivered. "I said *that!* And on *that* day——"

I stopped her. I said:

"Don't, dearest. Stop thinking about . . . about everything that's ever happened before now. But tell me one thing first. Why did you say, just now, that you were glad you'd married him?"

The gray eyes widened again. And they smiled. The lips below them said:

"Because . . . don't you see? . . . because if . . . if I hadn't, I should never have seen *you!*"

# APPENDIX A[1]

STATEMENT *showing actual consequence of events in execution of crime.*

AT just before a quarter to seven on the evening of Friday, 18th August, Belton drove his car to Samsford Garage. In the closed rumble seat of this car was Harris, wearing a cap, dustcoat, and goggles identical with Belton's, and wearing also a small black moustache of the same shape as Belton's.

After leaving the garage at 6:47 Belton drives up the hill past Lawless's house to the gate into the field. (See field and spot ④ on plan.)[1] Here, making sure there is no one about, he gets out of the car and Harris, dressed like him, takes over. Belton climbs the park wall and makes cautious way to the Dell, where Aviss is already.

At 6:55 Grenville arrives and is stunned by Aviss and subsequently shot by Belton.

At 7:00 Harris (as Belton) is filling up with oil at a twelve-mile distant garage; in the park Aviss and Belton are hiding the body of Grenville for the first time.

At 7:10 Aviss is back in his car (which has been hidden at ④) and Belton is in *his*, driving himself, with Harris once more in the rumble seat.

At 7:15 Belton himself calls on Mrs. Willington and Aviss is really having a drink at Fielder's Bar.

At 7:30 Belton himself is actually having a drink at the

[1]See the frontispiece for Colonel Gethryn's plan.

Crosbie Arms on the Wynfoldingham Road and Aviss is buying his sausage roll at Fielder's Bar.

At 7:36 on the Wynfoldingham Road Belton appears to be tinkering with his car and actually does ask a passing rustic for the nearest garage. At the same time Aviss leaves Fielder's Bar.

At 7:40 (the time when Aviss says that he was driving slowly home from Fielder's Bar and Belton says he was still tinkering with his carburettor) they have actually met at the junction of the Wynfoldingham and Samsford–Fielder's Bar Road. (See top left-hand corner of map.) There, at 7:40, the prearranged collision takes place. Belton hides in the back of *Aviss's* car, and Harris takes over Belton's car, driving off to Fielder's Bar, etc., to establish further points of the alibi.

At 7:55 (the time when Aviss and Belton are swearing they collided) they themselves have got back to the Dell, having entered the park as shown on the plan and hidden Aviss's Cadillac at spot ⑤.

At 8:05 (when Harris as Belton is drinking at Fielder's Bar and Aviss swears he is still examining his car) Aviss and Belton are back at the Dell beginning to move the body to its second hiding-place.

Between 8:05 and 8:20 (while Aviss states he was driving slowly home) he and Belton complete their work and leave the body hidden in the copse just facing the right-of-way steps.

At 8:30 Belton in hiding (see ④ in field on plan) waiting for Harris. Actually does drive his car into the garage at Samsford.

At 8:40, while Aviss really is walking home, Belton is picked up by Harris, takes the car himself, hiding Harris in the rumble seat, and drives into his own house at 8:45, Aviss getting back to his house at the same time.

At 9:05 when Belton arrives at Mrs. Willington's, and Aviss arrives at The Moon, Harris is moving the body from the copse to the foot of the steps; the only part of the job possible for one man alone. The distance is small and the slope downhill.

# APPENDIX B

## Letter *From A. R. Gethryn to Michael Lawless.*

My dear Lawless,

Many thanks—and blast you!—for your letter. Yes: we are extremely hale. We are also glad to have your pleasing news. Give my very best respects to your wife. Mine says that you and yours must come and spend a week or two with us when we get back. Please do if you can.

Now for your elaborate questionnaire:

1. *Who fired at Aviss the night we went up with him to his house?*

   Harris. He told the maids he was going to the pictures, left the house and hid, according to orders, in Belton's shrubbery. The hole in Aviss's hat had been made beforehand. The plan of course was an elaboration, deemed necessary by Aviss because I was appearing to get a bit too warm, of the enmity business. It was more as well, because it was a suggestion that there was someone else altogether; someone I'd never thought of before, who was addicted to shooting people. It was rather a messy plan, not quite up to the Aviss standard. But you must remember that anything which would serve to keep me off the scent for even another twelve hours was enough for Aviss.

2. *Who loosened the wheel on the Voisin-Maxwell?*

   Harris, on orders. As soon as he had loosed off the shot which was supposed to have been at Aviss, he nipped out, jumped on his bicycle, and went

down to your house. It was quite dark then and the job of attending to my car quick, easy, and safe.

3. *Why did Aviss and Belton pretend to be enemies right from the beginning, when at the beginning they apparently had no intention of murdering Grenville?*

Easy. Because, although Grenville did not know Aviss-Guffy, it was most undesirable that he should ever even associate Belton-Brasil with Aviss. It was necessary for Aviss, because he was the brains of the concern, to be on the spot. But it was also necessary that there should be positive conviction in the world's mind that in no circumstances would he and Belton have anything to do with each other. For two years this carefully built up background of enmity was merely a precaution. In the third year it turned out that this precaution could be turned into something really useful—i. e., part of their alibis. The last and most brilliant stroke of all in this connection was the faked motor smash.[1] The inauguration of the rifle club was also precautionary.

4. *Why were Aviss and Belton able to count upon Dinwater not revealing anything at all—even Belton's identity with Brasil or the American associations?*

Not so easy. And very private. For your eye only the reason is this. Dinwater (under another name) is wanted by the N. Y. police. That force doesn't object at all to crooks bumping each other off but it does object to members of its own force being relieved of their lives. Dinwater—in mistake, he says—killed two persons in 1925.

[1]See Appendix A.

5. *How was it that Aviss telephoned from London on the night of his and Belton's death when, in reality, he must have been in Samsford itself or very near?*

Oh, my dear sir! Because you heard a voice say: "Is that Samsford 12, London wants you. Hold on," you aren't necessarily in a position to say, definitely, that that call was made from London. Words are easy. Differentiations of voice easier still.

6. *Why did he phone? Why Almus Schwirtz? Is there an Almus Schwirtz?*

a) Part of the plan—anything to keep me quiet for another twelve hours.

b) Ditto.

c) Yes and No. There is an Almus Schwirtz but Aviss's Almus Schwirtz is not Almus Schwirtz but only an entirely unimportant tool of Aviss's who probably didn't even know why he was made to write the letter which we saw. That letter was a letter; the only phoney thing about it was the name at its foot.

Aviss, you know, was the entire brains of the whole thing from beginning to end. He was clever and very clever. But one fault was always nearly tripping him up and did in the end really trip him up. He was over-elaborate. Everything which he did was so well thought out that it became *too* convincing. He and Belton hated each other too much. Their alibis were too perfect. They were too ready with the openly stated suspicions of each other. The shooting at Aviss—and Almus Schwirtz and the rest—all these were, especially once I had the idea in my head, that if A. and B. were really colleagues under the cloak of enmity,

it would give them a marvellous chance—all these were too red to be real herrings. I have said that over-elaboration was Aviss's downfall: it was, both directly and indirectly. Indirectly as I have just shown and directly by reason of those alibis. The alibis were so good. And Belton didn't mind giving his. And Aviss—you remember how he talked that night when he sat in your room just before we went up to his house and he wasn't shot—talked (quite cleverly, I admit) until he thought he had planted his own alibi in our minds without seeming to do so.

7. *When were you sure that Aviss was in it with Belton?*

See last sentence above. Nearly certain much earlier—when Aviss let slip his too exact knowledge of the date when Grenville took over inheritance.

8. *Why did you keep Harris until the inquest instead of handing him over earlier to the police? And why, if it comes to that, did you clear the whole thing up in the way you did—i. e., at the inquest before you told the police?*

Damn you! I kept Harris for a very good and sufficient reason. Harris is a Bowery tough. If I'd sent him along to an English police station he'd have thought probably that he was in a particularly pleasing nursing home. In the intervals of eating and drinking and having nice kind-faced policemen to chat with him, he would have had time and to spare in which to make up a beautiful story, miles from the truth, in which he would appear as an injured party. If you want to know how Mr. Harris and I spent the morning of that Thursday, you'd better ask him. I couldn't afford, you see, to have any funny stuff in court from

Mr. Harris. I had to be quite sure that he was going to take the most unusual exercise for him of telling the truth. So much for the first part of your question. For the second, you can apply anywhere else you like, you won't get anything from me.[1]

There you are and much good may it all do you! Good luck and don't forget to keep a fortnight free for us.

Yours,

A. R. GETHRYN

---

[1]I showed this letter to Sheila. When she got to this point, she stopped reading and stared at me. She said: "Dear fool, don't you see it was because of *us*. That was the quickest way to save us from further beastliness. He must have hated the whole thing. Shoving himself into the public eye and onto the front page of the papers like that—he loathes that sort of thing, hates it!"

THE END

*Whether you were keen enough to solve this Crime Club mystery in its early stages, or whether the author succeeded in keeping you in suspense up to the last chapter, Mastermind requests that you add to the next reader's enjoyment by remembering that—*

CRIME CLUB READERS
NEVER TELL

The
Poet's Corner
THE J K GILL Co